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FANTASTIC Novels MAGAZINE

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THE CONQUEST OF THE MOON POOL

by A. MERRITT

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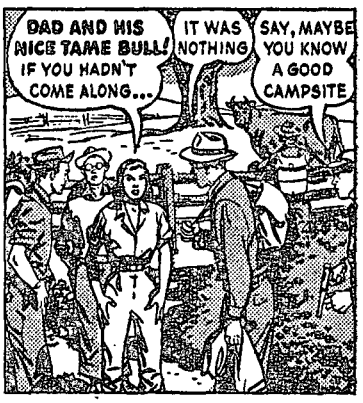

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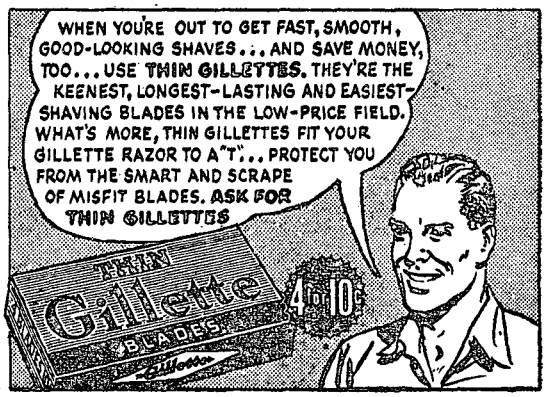
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FANTASTIC Novels MAGAZINE

Vol. 2 SEPTEMBER, 1948 No. 3

Book-Length Novel

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Beauty incomparable—devilish malignity unspeakable—what dread secret lay in wait in the lair of the Shining One?

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Cover by Lawrence. Inside illustrations by Finlay.

Published bi-monthly by New Publications, Inc., at 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, 16, Illinois. Editorial and Executive Offices, 210 East 43rd Street, New York 17, N. Y. Henry Steeger, President and Secretary. Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice President and Treasurer. Entered as second class matter January 14, 1948, at the post office at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1948, by New Publications, Inc. This issue is published simultaneously in the Dominion of Canada. Copyright under International Copyright Convention and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction, in whole or in part, in any form. Single copy, 25c. Annual subscription price for U. S. A., its possessions and Canada, $1.50; other countries 38c additional. All correspondence relating to this publication should be addressed to 2256 Grove Street, Chicago 16, Illinois, or 210 East 43rd Street, New York 17, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts, enclose stamped self-addressed envelope for their return if found unavailable. Care will be exercised in the handling of unsolicited manuscripts, but no responsibility for their return is assumed. Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional. Printed in U. S. A.

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THE CONQUEST OF THE MOON POOL

By A. Merritt

Beauty incomparable—devilish malignity unspeakable—what dread secret lay in wait in the lair of the Shining One?

CHAPTER I

THE DWELLER

AS I begin this narrative, I find it necessary to refer, briefly, to my original recital which appeared under the title of "The Moon Pool," of the causes that led me into the adventure of which it is to be the history. The adventure which would forge the last links in the chain to bind the Dweller.

I have told you of that dread night on the *Southern Queen,* when the monstrous, shining Thing of living light and mingled rapture and horror embraced Throckmartin and drew him from his cabin down the moon path to its lair beneath the Moon Pool. I had promised him I would solve the mystery. But I had delayed keeping this promise for three years, believing nothing could really be done, and fearing my story would not be believed. At last, however, remorse drove me into action.

Had I set forth for that group of Southern Pacific islets called the Nan-Matal, where the Moon Pool lay hidden, a day before or after, I would not have found Olaf Huldricksson, hands lashed to the wheel of his ravished *Brunhilda,* steering it even in his sleep down the track of the Dweller. Olaf whose wife and babe the

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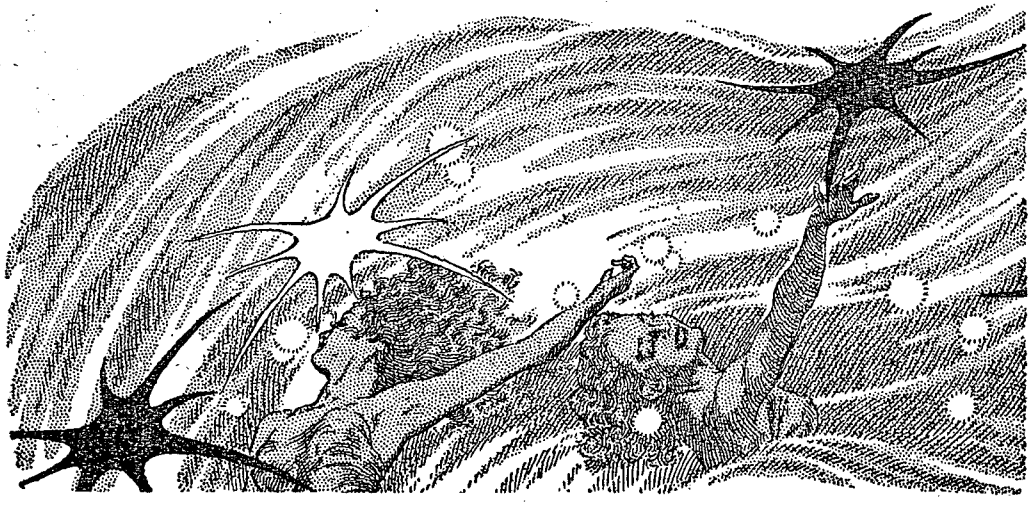

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Ever, radiant plumes and spirals expanding, the core of the Shining One waxed, as it drew into itself the life-force of these lost ones. . . .

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Dweller had snatched from him. Nor would I have picked up Larry O'Keefe from the wreck of his flying boat fast sinking under the long swells of the Pacific. And without O'Keefe and Huldricksson that weird and almost unthinkably fantastic drama enacted beyond the Moon Pool's gates must have had a very different curtain.

The remorse of a botanist, the burning, bitter hatred of a Norse seaman, the breaking of a wire in a flying-boat's wing —all these meeting at one fleeting moment formed the slender tripod upon which rested the fate of humanity! Could that universal irony which seems to mold our fortunes go further?

But there they were—O'Keefe and Huldricksson and I; Larry O'Keefe and Olaf Huldricksson and I, and Lakla of the flower face and wide, golden eyes. Lakla the Handmaiden of the Silent Ones, and the Three who had fashioned the Dweller from earth's secret heart—each thread in its place.

And so humanity lives!

And now let me recall to those who read my first narrative, and make plain to those who did not, what it was that took me on my quest; the enigmatic prelude in which the Dweller first tried its growing power.

You will remember that Dr. David Throckmartin, one of America's leaders in archeological and ethnological research, had set out for the Caroline Islands, accompanied by his young wife, Edith, his equally youthful associate, Dr. Charles Stanton, and Mrs. Throckmartin's nurse from babyhood, Thora Helverson.

Their destination was that extraordinary cluster of artificially squared, basalt-walled islets off the eastern coast of Ponape, the largest Caroline Island, known as the Nan-Matal. It was Throckmartin's belief that in those prehistoric ruins lay the clue to the lost and highly civilized race which had peopled that ancient continent, which, sinking beneath the waters of the pacific, Atlantis-like, had left in the islands we call Polynesia only its highest peaks.

Dr. Throckmartin planned to spend a year on the Nan-Matal, hoping that within its shattered temples and terraces, its vaults and cyclopean walls, or in the maze of secret tunnels that running under the sea threaded together the isles, he would recover not only a lost page of the history of our races, but also, perhaps, a knowledge that had vanished with it.

The subsequent fate of this expedition formed what became known as the Throckmartin mystery. Three months after the little party had landed at Ponape, and had been accompanied to the ruins by a score of reluctant native workmen—reluctant because all the islanders shun the Nan-Matal as a haunted place—Dr. Throckmartin appeared alone at Port Moresby, Papua.

There he said that he was going to Melbourne to employ some white workmen to help him in his excavations, the superstitions of the natives making their usefulness negligible. He took passage on the *Southern Queen*, sailing the same day that he appeared, and three nights later he vanished utterly from that vessel.

It was officially reported that he had either fallen from the ship or had thrown himself overboard. A relief party sent to the Nan-Matal for the others in his party found no trace of his wife, of Stanton, or of Thora Helverson. The native workmen, questioned, said that on the nights of the full moon the *ani* or spirits of the ruins had great power. That on these nights no Ponapean would go within sight or sound of them, and that by agreement with Throckmartin they had been allowed to return to their homes on these nights, leaving the expedition "to face the spirits alone."

AFTER the full of the moon on the third month of the expedition's stay, the natives had returned to the Throckmartin camp only to find it deserted. And then, "knowing that the *ani* had been stronger," they had fled.

I had been a passenger with Throckmartin on the *Southern Queen*. I had been with him when that wondrous horror which had followed him down the moon path after it had set its unholy seal upon him had snatched him from the vessel. He had told me his story, and I had promised, Heaven forgive me, that if the Dweller took him as it had taken his wife and Stanton and Thora, I would follow.

He had told me his story, and I knew that story was true—for twice I had seen the inexplicable power which Throckmartin, discovering, had loosed upon himself and those who loved him. That unearthly Thing which left on the faces of its prey soul-deep lines of mingled agony and rapture, of joy celestial and misery infernal, side by side, as though the hand of God and the hand of Satan working in harmony had etched them!

I first beheld the Dweller on that first

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night out from Papua when it came racing to claim Throckmartin.

We two were on the upper deck. He had not yet summoned the courage to tell me of what had befallen him. Storm threatened but suddenly, far to the north, the clouds parted, and upon the waters far away the moon shone.

Swiftly the break in the high-flung canopies advanced toward us and the silver rapids of the moon stream between them came racing down toward the *Southern Queen* like a gigantic, shining serpent writhing over the rim of the world. And down its shimmering length a pillared radiance sped. It reached the barrier of blackness that still held between the ship and the head of the moon stream and beat against it with a swirling of shimmering misty plumes, throbbing lacy opalescences and vaporous spiralings of living light.

Then, as the protecting shadow grew less, I saw that within the pillar was a core, a nucleus of intense light—veined, opalescent, vital. And through gusts of tinkling music came a murmuring cry as of a calling from another sphere, making soul and body shrink from it irresistibly and reach toward it with an infinite longing. "Av-o-lo-ha! Av-o-lo-ha!" it sighed.

Straight toward the radiant vision walked Throckmartin, his face transformed from all human semblance by unholy blending of agony and rapture that had fallen over it like a mask. And then—the clouds closed, the moon path was blotted out, and where the shining Thing had been was—nothing!

What had been there was the Dweller!

It was after I had beheld that apparition that Throckmartin told me what would have been, save for what my own eyes had seen, his incredible story. How, upon a first night of the full moon, camping on another shore, they had seen lights moving on the outer bulwarks of that islet of the Nan-Matal, called Nan-Tanach, the "place of frowning walls," and faintly to them over the waters had crept the crystalline music, while far beneath, as though from vast distant caverns, a mighty muffled chanting had risen. How, on going to Nan-Tanach next day, they had found set within the inner of its three titanic terraces, a slab of stone, gray and cold and strangely repellent to the touch. Above it and on each side was a rounded breast of basalt in each of which were seven little circles that gave to the hand that same alien shock, "as of frozen electricity," that contact with the gray slab gave.

And that night, when sleep had seemed to drop down upon them from the moon, but before the sleep had conquered him, he had seen the court of the gray rock curdle with light. Into it had walked Thora, bathed and filled with a pulsing effulgence beside which all earthly light was shadow!

He told me of their search for Thora at dawn, when the slumber had fallen from their eyes, and of their discovery of her kerchief caught beneath the lintel of the gray slab, betraying that it had opened, and opening, closed upon her. Of their efforts to force it, and of the vigil that night when Stanton was taken and walked "like a corpse in which flamed a god and a devil" in the embrace of the Dweller upon the shattered walls of Tanach, vanishing at last through the moon door, even as had Thora. And the muffled, distant, mighty chanting as of a multitude that hailed his passage.

After that, of the third night, when his wife and he watched despairingly beside the moon door, waiting for it to open, hoping to surprise the shining Thing that came through it, and surprising, conquer it. Of their wait until the moon swam up and its full light shone upon the terrace. Of the sudden gleaming out of the little circles under its rays and of the sighing murmur of the moon door, swinging open as its hidden mechanism responded to the force of the light falling on the circles. And of his mad rush down the glimmering passage beyond the moon-door portal to the threshold of the wondrous chamber of the Moon Pool.

ABSORBED, silent, marveling, I listened as he described that place of mystery—a vaulted arch that seemed to open into space; a space filled with lambent, coruscating, many-colored mist whose brightness grew even as he watched; before him an awesome pool, circular, perhaps twenty feet wide. Around it a low, softly curving lip of glimmering, silvery stone. The pool's water was palest blue. Within its silvery rim it was like a great, blue eye staring upward.

Upon it streamed seven shafts of radiance.

They poured down upon it like torrents; they were like shining pillars of light rising from a sapphire floor. One was the tender pink of the pearl; one of the aurora's green; a third a deathly white; the fourth the blue in mother-of-pearl; a shimmering column of pale amber; a beam

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of amethyst; a shaft of molten silver. The pool drank them!

And even as Throckmartin gazed, he saw run through the blue water tiny gleams of phosphorescence, sparkles and coruscations of pale incandescence, and far, far down in its depths he sensed a movement, a shifting gleam as of some radiant body slowly rising.

Mists then began to float up from the surface, tiny swirls that held and hung in the splendor of the seven shafts, absorbing their glory and at last coalescing into the shape I had seen and that he called the Dweller.

He had raised his pistol and sent bullet after bullet into it. And as he did so, out from it swept a gleaming tentacle. It caught him above the heart; wrapped itself round him. Over him rushed a mingled ecstasy and horror. It was, he said, as though the cold soul of evil and the burning soul of good had stepped together within him.

He saw that the shining nucleus of that which he had watched shape itself from vapors and light had form—but a form that eyes and brain could not define; as though a being of another world should assume what it might of human semblance, but could not hide that what human eyes saw was still only a part of it. It was neither man nor woman; it was unearthly and androgynous and even as he found its human semblance, that semblance changed, while all the while every atom of him thrilled with interwoven rapture and terror.

Behind him he had heard the swift feet of his wife, racing to his aid. Love gave him power, and he wrested himself from the Dweller. Even as he did so he fell, and saw her rush straight into the radiant glory! Saw, too, the Dweller swiftly wrap its shining mists around her and draw her over the lip of the pool; dragged himself to the verge and watched her sink in its embrace, down, down through the depths—"a shining, many-colored, nebulous cloud, and in it Edith's face, disappearing, her eyes staring up at me filled with ecstasy supernal and infernal horror—and—vanished!"

Then, far below, again the triumphant chanting!

There had come to Throckmartin madness. He had memory of running wildly through glimmering passages; then blackness and oblivion until he found himself far out at sea in the little boat they had used to cruise around the lagoons of the Nan-Matal. He had bribed the half-caste captain of a ship that picked him up to take him to Port Moresby, from whence he intended to go to Melbourne, hoping to find some who would return with him, force the haunted chamber, and battle with him against the Dweller.

And on that third night I cowered in the corner of his cabin and saw the Dweller take him!

For three years I was silent, and then, obeying a sudden, irresistible impulse, I started, alone, for the Nan-Matal to make reparation. For Throckmartin had not entirely believed that his wife was dead, nor Stanton nor Thora; rather he thought that they might be held in some unearthly bondage.

And he had, too, a vague belief that the deep, underground chantings that had accompanied the disappearance of the Dweller with its victims, pointing clearly as they did to the existence of other beings or powers in its mysterious den, held a vast threat against humanity. How true was his scientific clairvoyance, and yet how far from the amazing, unthinkable truth, you are to learn. It was my own conviction that in both he had been right; and it was this conviction which now forced me onward at all speed toward the Carolines.

I delayed my departure from America only long enough to get certain instruments and apparatus that long brooding over the phenomena had suggested might be useful in coping with them.

Nine weeks later, with my paraphernalia, I was northward bound from Port Moresby on the *Suwarna,* a swift little copra sloop with a fifty-horse-power motor auxiliary, and heading for Ponape—for the Nan-Matal and the Chamber of the Moon Pool and all that it held for me of soul-shaking awe and peril.

WE SIGHTED the *Brunhilda* some five hundred miles south of Ponape. Soon after we had left Port Moresby the wind had fallen, but the *Suwarna,* although far from being as fragrant as the Javan flower for which she was named, could do her twelve knots an hour. Da Costa, the captain, was a garrulous Portuguese. The crew were six huge, chattering Tonga boys.

The *Suwarna* had cut through Finschafen Huon Gulf to the protection of the Bismarcks, and we were rolling over the thousand-mile stretch of open ocean with New Hanover far behind us and our boat's bow pointed straight toward Nukuor of the Monte Verdes. After we had rounded Nu-

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kuor we should, barring accident, reach Ponape in not more than sixty hours.

Beneath us the slow, prodigious swells of the Pacific lifted us in gentle, giant hands and sent us as gently down the long, blue wave slopes to the next broad, upward slope. There was a spell of peace over the ocean that was semihypnotic, stilling even the Portuguese captain who stood dreamily at the wheel, slowly swaying to the rhythmic lift and fall of the sloop.

There came a whining hail from the Tonga boy lookout draped lazily over the bow.

"Sail he b'long port side!"

Da Costa straightened and gazed while I raised my glass. The vessel was a scant mile away, and must have been visible long before the sleepy watcher had seen her. She was a sloop about the size of the *Suwarna*, without power. All sails set, even to a spinnaker she carried, she was making the best of the little breeze. I tried to read her name, but the vessel jibed sharply as though the hands of the man at the wheel had suddenly dropped the helm—and then with equal abruptness swung back to her course. The stern came in sight, and on it I read *Brunhilda*.

"Something veree wrong I think there, sair," the Portuguese said in his curious English. "The man on deck I know. He is captain and owner of the *Br-rwun'ild*. His name Olaf Huldricksson, what you say—Norwegian. He is eithair veree sick or veree tired, but I do not understand where is the crew and the starb'd boat is gone."

We were now nearly abreast and a scant five hundred yards away. The engine of the *Suwarna* died and the Tonga boys leaped to one of the boats.

"You Olaf Huldricksson!" shouted Da Costa. "What's a matter wit' you?"

"Wait!" I cried. I ran into my cabin, grasped my emergency medical kit and climbed down the rope ladder. The two Tonga boys bent to the oars. We reached the side and Da Costa and I each seized a lanyard dangling from the stays and swung ourselves swiftly on board. Da Costa approached Huldricksson softly.

"What's the matter, Olaf?" he began and then was silent, looking down at the wheel. My gaze followed his and we shrank together involuntarily. For the hands of Huldricksson were lashed fast to the spokes of the wheel by thongs of thin, strong cord. They had been bound so tightly that they were swollen and black. The thongs had bitten so into the sinewy wrists that they were hidden in the outraged flesh, cutting so deeply that blood fell, slow drop by drop, at his feet. We sprang toward him, reaching out hands to his fetters to loose them. Even as we touched them, Huldricksson grew rigid with anger that had in it something diabolic. He aimed a vicious kick at me and then another at Da Costa which sent the Portuguese tumbling into the scuppers.

"Let be!" croaked Huldricksson; his voice was as thick and lifeless as though forced from a dead throat, and I saw that his lips were cracked and dry and his parched tongue was black. "Let be! Go! Let be!" The words beat upon the ears heavily, painfully. It was the dead alive and speaking!

"I go below," said Da Costa nervously. "His wife, his little Freda, they are always wit' him. You wait." He darted down the companionway and was gone. Huldricksson suddenly was silent, slumping down over the wheel, forgetting us.

Da Costa's head appeared at the top of the companion steps.

"There is nobody, nobody," he said. "I do not understan'."

Then Olaf Huldricksson opened his dry lips again and as he spoke a thrill ran though me, stopping my heart.

"The sparkling devil took them!" croaked Olaf Huldricksson. "The sparkling devil took them! Took my Helma and my little Freda! The sparkling devil came down from the moon and took them!"

It was with utmost difficulty that we loosed the thongs, but at last it was done.

WE RIGGED a little swing and the Tonga boys slung the great inert body over the side into the dory. Soon we had Huldricksson in my bunk. De Costa sent half his crew over to the sloop in charge of the Cantonese. They took in all sail, stripping Huldricksson's boat to the masts and then with the *Brunhilda* nosing quietly along after us at the end of a long hawser, one of the Tonga boys at her wheel, we re-resumed our way.

Suddenly I was aware of Da Costa's presence and turned. His unease was manifest and held, it seemed to me, a queer, furtive anxiety.

"What you think of Olaf, sair?" he asked. I shrugged my shoulders. "You think he killed his woman and his babee?" he went on. "You think he crazee and killed all?"

"Nonsense, Da Costa," I answered. "You saw the boat was gone. His crew mutinied

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and tied him up the way that you saw."

Da Costa shook his head slowly. "No," he said. "No. The crew did not. Nobody there on board when Olaf was tied."

"What!" I cried, startled. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," he said slowly, "that Olaf tie himself!"

I bent over the sleeper. On his face was no trace of that unholy mingling of opposites, of mingled joy and fear, that the Dweller stamped upon its victims. But with Da Costa's revelations the security I had felt in my theory of the prisoned wrists crumbled. Huldricksson's words came back to me—"The sparkling devil took them!" Nay, they had been even more explicit—"The sparkling devil that came down from the moon!"

They sank upon my heart like weights, carrying subconscious conviction that resisted all my efforts to dismiss. I lifted the sheet from Huldricksson and went over his body minutely, turning it from side to side. The Norseman was, as I have said, a giant, and his mighty, muscled form was clean and white as a girl's. Nowhere was there a trace of that cold, white stain which was the mark of the touch of the Dweller and that had been, on Throckmartin, a shining cincture girdling the body just below the heart.

Throckmartin had believed, and I had believed with him, that the thing I had gone forth to find had no power outside the islet of the moon door and that it was only by virtue of that mark it had been enabled to follow him. But was this true? Huldricksson had been steering straight for Ponape, not away from it—and there was no trace of the Nan-Matal's dread mystery upon him.

As I sat thinking, the cabin grew suddenly dark, and from above came a shouting and patter of feet. Down upon us swept one of the abrupt, violent squalls that are met with in those latitudes. I lashed Huldricksson fast in the berth and ran up on deck.

A half hour passed. Then the squall died as quickly as it had arisen. The sea quieted. Over in the west, from beneath the tattered, flying edge of the storm, dropped the setting sun.

I watched it, and rubbed my eyes and stared again. For over its flaming portal something huge and black moved, like a gigantic beckoning finger!

Da Costa had seen it, too, and he turned the *Suwarna* straight toward the descending orb and its strange shadows. As we approached we saw it was a little mass of wreckage and that the beckoning finger was a wing of canvas, sticking up and swaying with the motion of the waves. On the highest point of the wreckage sat a tall figure calmly smoking a cigarette.

We brought the *Suwarna* to, dropped a boat, and with myself as coxswain pulled toward what I knew now was a wrecked hydroplane. Its occupant took a long puff at his cigarette, waved a cheerful hand, and shouted a reassuring greeting. And just as he did so a great wave raised itself up behind him, took the wreckage, tossed it high in a swelter of foam, and passed on. When we had steadied our boat, where wreck and man had been was—nothing.

I scanned the water with anxious eyes. Who had been this debonair castaway, and from whence in these far seas had dropped his plane? There came a tug at the side of our boat, two muscular brown hands gripped it close to my left, and a sleek, black, wet head showed its top between them. Two bright blue eyes that held deep within them a laughing deviltry looked into mine, and a long, lithe body drew itself gently over the thwart and seated its dripping self at my feet.

"Much obliged," said this man from the sea. "I knew somebody was sure to come along when the O'Keefe banshee didn't show up."

"The what?" I asked in amazement.

"The O'Keefe banshee. Oh, yes, pardon me, I'm Larry O'Keefe. It's a far way from Ireland, but not too far for the O'Keefe banshee to travel if the O'Keefe was going to kick in."

I looked again at my astonishing rescue. He seemed perfectly serious, and later I was to know how exasperatingly, naïvely, and entirely serious he was on that subject.

"Have you a cigarette?" said Larry O'Keefe. "Mine went out," he added with a grin, as he reached a moist hand out for the little cylinder, took it, lighted it on the match I struck for him, and then gazed at me frankly and with manifest curiosity. I returned the gaze as frankly.

I saw a lean, intelligent face whose fighting jaw was softened by the wistfulness of the clean-cut lips and the roguishness that lay side by side with the deviltry in the laughing blue eyes. Nose of a thoroughbred with the suspicion of a tilt. A long, well-knit, slender figure that I knew must have all the strength of fine steel; the uniform of a lieutenant in the Royal Flying Corps of Britain's navy.

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He laughed, stretched out a firm hand, and gripped mine.

"Thank you ever so much, old man."

I liked Larry O'Keefe from the beginning, but I did not dream how that liking was to be forged into man's strong love for man by fires which souls such as his and mine—and yours who read this—could never dream.

Larry! Larry O'Keefe, where are you now with your leprechawns and banshee, your heart of a child, your laughing blue eyes, and your fearless soul? Shall I ever see you again, Larry O'Keefe, dear to me as some best-beloved younger brother? Larry!

CHAPTER II

LARRY O'KEEFE

PRESSING back the questions I longed to ask, I introduced myself.

A second later we touched the side of the *Suwarna*, and I was forced to curb my curiosity until we reached the deck. Da Costa greeted us eagerly, and was plainly gratified by the military salute which O'Keefe bestowed upon him.

"You haven't seen a German boat called the *Wolf* about, have you?" he asked with a grin, after he had elaborately thanked the bowing little Portuguese skipper for his rescue. "That thing you saw me sitting on was all that was left of one of His Majesty's best little hydroplanes after that cyclone threw it off as excess baggage. And by the way, about where are we?"

Da Costa gave him our approximate position from the noon reckoning.

O'Keefe whistled. "A good three hundred miles from where I left the H. M. S. *Dolphin* about four hours ago," he said. "That squall I rode in on was some whizzer!

"About an hour ago I thought I saw a chance to dig up and out of it. I turned, and blick went my upper right wing, and down I dropped. Engine began to work lose, and just as I knew something had to come along quick or the banshee of the O'Keefes was due for a long, swift trip from Ireland, I sighted you."

He hesitated. "Where are you bound, by the way?" he asked.

"For Ponape," I answered.

"No wireless there," mused O'Keefe. "Beastly hole. Stopped a week ago for fruit. Natives seemed scared to death at us—or something. What are you going there for?"

I saw Da Costa dart a furtive glance at me. It troubled me. I had, of course, told him nothing of the real reasons for my journey, stating simply, when I had employed him, that I wished to go to Ponape where the scientific work I had planned might keep me many weeks. What did the man know, I wondered, and what was the explanation of his remarks in the cabin and of his manifest unease? O'Keefe's sharp eyes had noted the glance and, misinterpreting it and my consequent hesitation, flushed in embarrassment.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," he said. "Maybe I oughtn't to have asked that?"

"It's no secret, lieutenant," I replied, somewhat testily. "I'm about to undertake some exploration work there. A little digging among the ruins on the Nan-Matal."

I looked at the Portuguese sharply as I named the place. I distinctly saw a pallor creep under his skin and then he made swiftly the sign of the cross, glancing as he did so uneasily to the north. I made up my mind then to question him when opportunity came. He turned from his quick scrutiny of the sea and addressed O'Keefe.

"There's nothing on board to fit you, lieutenant," he said, looking over the tall figure before him. "But perhaps we can find something while your clothes dry. Will you come to my cabin?"

"Oh, just give me a sheet to throw around me, captain," said O'Keefe, following him. Darkness had fallen, and as the two disappeared I softly opened the door of my own cabin and listened. I could hear Huldricksson breathing deeply.

I drew my electric flash, and shielding its rays from my face, looked at him. His sleeping was changing from the heavy stupor of the drug into one that was at least on the borderland of the normal. Satisfied as to his condition, I returned to deck.

O'Keefe was there on deck, looking like a specter in the cotton sheet he had wrapped about him. A deck table had been cleated down and one of the Tonga boys was setting it for our dinner. Soon the very creditable larder of the *Suwarna* dressed the board, and O'Keefe, Da Costa and I attacked it. The night had grown close and oppressive. Behind us the forward light of the *Brunhilda* glided and the binnacle lamp threw up a faint glow in which her black helmsman's face stood out mistily. O'Keefe had looked curiously a number of times at our tow, but had asked no questions.

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"You're not the only passenger we picked up today," I told him. "We found the captain of that sloop, lashed to his wheel, nearly dead with exhaustion, and his boat deserted by every one except himself."

"What was the matter?" asked O'Keefe in astonishment.

"We don't know," I answered. "He fought us, and I had to drug him before we could get him loose from his lashings. He's sleeping down in my berth now. His wife and little girl ought to have been on board, the captain here says, but—they weren't."

"Any signs of there being a fight?" asked O'Keefe.

I shook my head, and again I saw Da Costa swiftly cross himself. "We'll have to wait until he wakes up to get the story," I concluded.

DA COSTA at last relieved the Cantonese at the wheel. O'Keefe and I drew chairs up to the rail. The brighter stars shone out dimly through a hazy sky. "Are you American or Irish, O'Keefe?" I asked suddenly.

"Why?" he laughed.

"Because," I answered, "from your name and your service I would suppose you Irish, but your command of pure Americanese makes me doubtful."

He grinned amiably.

"I'll tell you how that is," he said. "My mother is an American—a Grace, of Virginia. My father was O'Keefe, of Coleraine. And these two loved each other so well that the heart they gave me is half Irish and half American. My father died when I was sixteen. I used to go to the States with my mother every other year for a month or two. But after my father died we used to go to Ireland every other year. And there you are. I'm as American as I am Irish.

"When I'm in love, or excited, or dreaming, or mad I have the brogue. But for the every-day purposes of life I like the United States talk, and I know Broadway as well as I do Binevenagh Lane, and the Sound as well as St. Patrick's Channel. Educated a bit at Eton, a bit at Oxford, a bit at Harvard. Always too much O'Keefe with Grace money to have to make any. In love lots of times, and never a heartache after that wasn't a pleasant one, and never a real purpose in life until I took the king's shilling and earned my wings; always ready for adventure—Larry O'Keefe."

"But it was the Irish O'Keefe who sat out there waiting for the banshee," I laughed.

"It was that," he said somberly, and I heard the brogue creep over his voice like velvet and his eyes grew brooding again. "There's never an O'Keefe for these thousand years that has passed without his warning. An' twice have I heard the banshee calling—once it was when my younger brother died an' once when my father lay waiting to be carried out on the ebb tide."

He mused a moment, then went on: "An' once I saw an Annir Choille, a girl of the green people, flit like a shadow of green fire through the Carntogher woods, an' once at Dunchraig I slept where the ashes of the Dun of Cormac MacConcobar are mixed with those of Cormac an' Eilidh the Fair, all burned in the nine flames that sprang from the harping of Cravetheen, an' I heard the echo of his dead harpings—"

There was a little silence. I looked upon him with wonder. Clearly he was in deepest earnest. I know the psychology of the Gael is a curious one and that deep in all their hearts their ancient tradition and beliefs have strong and living roots.

"You can't make me see what you've seen, lieutenant," I laughed. "But you can make me hear. I've always wondered what kind of a noise a disembodied spirit could possibly make without any vocal cords or breath or any other earthly sound-producing mechanism. How does the banshee sound?"

O'Keefe did not laugh.

"All right," he said. "I'll show you." From deep down in his throat came first a low, weird sobbing that mounted steadily into a keening whose mournfulness made my skin creep. And then O'Keefe's hand shot out and gripped my shoulder, and I stiffened like stone in my chair—for from behind us, like an echo, and then taking up the cry, swelled a wail that seemed to hold within it a sublimation of the sorrows of centuries! It gathered itself into one heartbroken, sobbing note and died away! O'Keefe's grip loosened, and he rose swifty to his feet.

"It's all right, Goodwin," he said. "It's for me. It found me, all this way from Ireland."

There was no trace of fear in face or voice. "Buck up, professor," laughed O'Keefe. "There's nothing for you to be afraid of. And never yet was there an O'Keefe who feared the kind spirit that carries the warnin'."

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Again the silence was rent by the cry. But now I had located it. It came from my room, and it could mean only one thing. Huldricksson had wakened.

"Forget your banshee!" I gasped, and made a jump for the cabin.

OUT OF the corner of my eye I noted a look of half-sheepish relief flit over O'Keefe's face, and then he was beside me. Da Costa shouted an order from the wheel, the Cantonese ran up and took it from his hands and the little Portuguese pattered down toward us. My hand on the door, ready to throw it open, I stopped. What if the Dweller were within? What if the new power I feared it had attained had made it not only independent of place but independent of that full flood of moon ray which Throckmartin had thought essential to draw it from the blue pool!

The Portuguese had paused, too, and looking at him I saw my own cravenness reflected. Now, from within, the sobbing wail began once more to rise. O'Keefe pushed me aside and with one quick motion threw open the door and crouched low within it. I saw an automatic flash dully in his hand; saw it cover the cabin from side to side, following the swift sweep of his eyes around it. Then he straightened and his face, turned toward the berth, was filled with wondering pity.

Da Costa and I had stepped in behind him. Through the window streamed a shaft of the moonlight. It fell upon Huldricksson's staring eyes; in them great tears slowly gathered and rolled down his cheeks; from his opened mouth came the woe-laden wailing. I ran to the port and drew the curtains. Da Costa snapped the lights.

The Norseman's dolorous crying stopped as abruptly as though cut. His gaze rolled toward us. And then his whole body reddened with a shock of rage, and at one bound he broke through the strong leashes I had buckled around him and faced us, a giant, naked figure tense with wrath, his eyes glaring, his yellow hair almost erect with the force of the passion visibly surging through him. Da Costa shrunk behind me. O'Keefe, coolly watchful, took a quick step that brought him in front of me.

"Where do you take me?" said Huldricksson, and his voice was thick as the growl of a wild beast. "Where is my boat?"

I touched O'Keefe gently and stood in front of the giant. He glared at me, and I saw the muscles of the gigantic arms flex and the hands below the bandaged wrist clench. He was berserk—mad!

"Listen, Olaf Huldricksson," I said. "We take you to where the sparkling devil took your Helma and your Freda. We follow the sparkling devil that came down from the moon. Do you hear me?" I spoke slowly, distinctly, striving to pierce the mists that I knew swirled around the strained brain. And the words did pierce. He stared at me for a moment. I heard O'Keefe murmur: "Good stuff! That's the idea. Humor him." Huldricksson stared at me and thrust out a shaking hand. As I gripped it I saw his madness fade, while his great chest heaved and fell. "You say you follow?" he asked falteringly. "You know where to follow? Where it took my Helma and my little Freda?"

"Just that, Olaf Huldricksson," I answered. "Just that! I pledge you my life that I know."

Once more Huldricksson searched me with his glance; once more turned and absorbed O'Keefe in the blue of his eyes.

"A man, *ja*," he muttered. He pointed to me. "And you—a man *ja!* But not the same as him—and me."

"I tell," he said, and seated himself on the side of the bunk. "It was four nights ago. My Freda"—his voice shook—"Mine *yndling!* She loved the moonlight. I was at the wheel and my Freda and my Helma they were behind me. The moon was behind us and the *Brunhilda* was like a swan-boat sailing down with the moonlight sending her, *ja*.

"I heary my Freda say; 'I see a *nisse* coming down the track of the moon.' And I hear her mother laugh, low like a mother does when her *yndling* dreams. I was happy, that night, with my Helma and my Freda, and the *Brunhilda* sailing like a swan-boat, *ja*. I heard the child say, 'The nisse comes fast!' And then I heard a scream from my Helma, a great scream—like a mare when her foal is torn from her. I spun around fast, *ja!* I dropped the wheel and spun fast! I saw—" He covered his eyes with his hands.

THE Portuguese had crept close to me and I heard him panting like a frightened dog. O'Keefe, immobile, watched the Norseman narrowly. His hand fell and hate crept into his eyes; a bitter hate; that winged and white-hot hate that makes even the gods tremble.

"I saw a white fire spring over the rail," whispered Olaf Huldricksson. "It whirled round and round, and it shone like—like

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stars in a whirlwind mist. There was a noise in my ears. It sounded like bells—little bells, *ja!* Like the music you make when you run your finger round goblets. It made me sick and dizzy, the bells' noise.

"My Helma was—*indeholde*—what you say—in the middle of the white fire. She turned her face to me and she turned it on the child, and my Helma's face burned into my heart. Because it was full of fear, and it was full of happiness—of *glyaede*. I tell you that the fear in my Helma's face made me ice here"—he beat his breast with clenched hand—"but the happiness in it burned on me like fire. And I could not move.

"I said in here"—he touched his head—"I said, 'It is Loki come out of Helvede. But he cannot take my Helma, for Christ lives and Loki has no power to hurt my Helma or my Freda! Christ lives! Christ lives!' I said. But the sparkling devil did not let my Helma go. It drew her to the rail; half over it. I saw her eyes upon the child and a little she broke away and reached to it. And my Freda jumped into her arms. And the fire wrapped them both and they were gone! A little I saw them whirling on the moon track behind the *Brunhilda*, and they were gone!

"The sparkling devil took them! Loki was loosed, and he had power. I turned the *Brunhilda*, and I followed where my Helma and mine *yndling* had gone. My boys crept up and asked me to turn again. But I would not. They dropped a boat and left me. I steered straight on the path. I lashed my hands to the wheel that sleep might not loose them. I steered on and on and on—

"Where was the God I prayed when my wife and child were taken?" cried Olaf Huldricksson—and it was as though I heard Throckmartin three years before asking that same bitter question. "I have left Him as He left me *ja!* I pray now to Thor and to Odin, who can fetter Loki!" He sank back, then, covering again his eyes.

"Olaf," I said, "what you have called the sparkling devil has taken ones dear to me. I, too, was following it when we found you. You shall go with me to its home, and there we will try to take from it your wife and child and my friends as well. But now that you may be strong for what is before us, you must sleep again."

"You speak the truth!" he said at last slowly. "I will do what you say!"

Beside the sleeping Norseman, when the little Portuguese had turned in, I told O'Keefe my story from end to end. He asked few questions as I spoke; only watched me with a somewhat disconcerting intensity. In the main his inquiries dealt with the sound phenomena accompanying the apparition of the Dweller. He made a few somewhat startling interruptions dealing with Throckmartin's psychology. And after I had finished he cross-examined me rather minutely upon my recollections of the radiant phases upon each appearance, checking these with Throckmartin's observations of the same activities in the Chamber of the Moon Pool.

"And now what do you think of it all?" I asked.

He sat silent for a while.

"Not just what you seem to think, Dr. Goodwin," he answered at last, gravely. "Let me sleep over it and, like the captain, I'll tell you tomorrow. One thing of course is certain—you and your friend Throckmartin and this man here saw—something. But"— he was silent again and then continued with a kindness that I found vaguely irritating—"but I've noticed that when a scientist gets superstitious it—er—takes very hard!

"Here's a few things I can tell you now, though," went on O'Keefe, while I struggled to speak. "I pray in my heart that the old *Dolphin* is so busy she'll forget me for a while and that we won't meet anything with wireless on board her going up. Because, Dr. Goodwin, I'd dearly love to take a crack at your Dweller.

"Good night!" said Larry O'Keefe and took himself out to the deck hammock he had insisted upon having slung for him, refusing the captain's importunities to use his own cabin.

Half laughing, half irritated and wholly happy in even the part promise of Larry O'Keefe's comradeship on my venture, I arranged a couple of pillows, stretched myself out on two chairs and took up my vigil beside Olaf Huldricksson.

CHAPTER III

THE MOON DOOR OPENS—AND SHUTS

WHEN I awakened the sun was streaming through the cabin porthole. Outside a fresh voice lilted. I lay on my two chairs and listened. The song was one with the wholesome sunshine and the breeze blowing stiffly and whipping the curtains. It was Larry O'Keefe at his matins.

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I opened my door. O'Keefe stood outside laughing. Behind him the Tonga boys clustered, wide-toothed and adoring. Even the Cantonese mate had something on his face that served for a grin and Da Costa was beaming. I closed the door behind me.

"How's the patient?" asked O'Keefe.

He was answered by Huldricksson himself, who must have risen just as I left the cabin. The great Norseman had slipped on a pair of pajamas and, giant torso naked under the sun, he strode out upon us. We all of us looked at him a trifle anxiously. But Olaf's madness had left him. His face was still drawn and in his eyes was much sorrow, but the berserk rage had vanished. He stretched out a hand to us in turn.

"This is Dr. Goodwin, Olaf," said Da Costa. "An' this is Lieutenant O'Keefe of the English Navy."

Huldricksson bowed, with a touch of grace that revealed him not all rough seaman—and indeed, as I was later to find the Norwegian had been given gentle upbringing and a fair education before the wanderlust of his race had swept him into these far seas.

He addressed himself straight to me: "You said last night we follow?"

I nodded.

"It is where?" he asked again.

"We go first to Ponape and from there to Metalanim Harbor—to the Nan-Matal. You know the place?"

Huldricksson bowed, a white gleam as of ice showing in his blue eyes.

"It is there?" he asked.

"It is there that we must first search," I answered.

"Good!" said Olaf Huldricksson. "It is good!"

The *Suwarna* hove to and Da Costa and he dropped into the small boat. When they reached the *Brunhilda's* deck I saw Olaf take the wheel and the two fall into earnest talk. I beckoned to O'Keefe and we stretched ourselves out on the bow hatch under cover of the foresail. He lighted a cigarette, took a couple of leisurely puffs, and looked at me expectantly.

"Well," I asked, "and what do you think of it now?"

"Well," said O'Keefe, "suppose you tell me what you think, and then I'll proceed to point out your scientific errors." His eyes twinkled mischievously.

"I think," I said, "it is possible that some members of that race peopling the ancient continent which we know existed here in the Pacific and which was destroyed by a comparatively gradual subsidence, have survived. We know that many of these islands are honey-combed with caverns and vast subterranean spaces too great to be so called. These are literally underground lands, running in many cases far out beneath the ocean floor. It is possible that for some reason the survivors of this race of which I speak sought refuge in these abysmal spaces, one of whose entrances is on the island where Throckmartin's party met its end.

"As for their persistence in these caverns, we know the lost people possessed a high science. This is indisputable. It may be that they had gone far in their mastery of certain universal forms of energy. They may have discovered the secret of that form of magnetic etheric vibration we call light. If so, they would have had no difficulty in maintaining life down there, and, indeed, shielded by earth's crust from the natural forces which always have surface man more or less at their mercy, they may have developed a civilization and extended a science immensely more advanced than ours. And unless they have also developed a complete indifference to conquest and an inflexible determination never to come forth from their world, they must always continue to be a potential menace to our world."

I paused. His keen face was now all eager attention.

"Have you ever heard of the Chamats?" I asked him. He shook his head.

"In Papua," I explained, "there is a widespread and immeasurably old tradition that 'imprisoned under the hills' is a race of giants who once ruled this region 'when it stretched from sun to sun' and 'before the moon god drew the waters over it,—I quote from the legend. Not only in Papua but in Borneo and Java and in fact throughout Malaysia you find this story. And, so the tradition runs, these people—the Chamats—will one day break through the hills and rule the world; 'make over the world' is the literal translation of the constant phrase in the tale. Does this convey anything to you, Larry?"

"Something," he nodded. "Go on."

"It conveys something to me," I said, "especially in the light of what Throckmartin heard and saw and what Huldricksson and I witnessed.

"It is possible that these survivors are experimenting with their science, and that what I call 'the Dweller' is one of their results. Or it may be that the phenomenon

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is something that they created long ago and control of which they may have lost. Or again it may be some unknown energy that they found when they entered their subterranean realm and which they have learned to control or which controls them.

"This much is sure—the moon door, which is clearly operated by the action of moonlight upon some unknown element or combination in much the same way that the metal selenium functions under sun rays or the electric light, and the crystals through which the moon rays pour down upon the pool their prismatic columns, are humanly made mechanisms.

"Set within the ruins they would seem to argue for the ancientness of the work. But who can tell when moon door and moon lights were set in their places? Nevertheless, so long as they are humanly made, and so long as it is this flood of moonlight from which the Dweller draws its power of materialization, the Dweller itself, if not the product of the human mind is at least dependent upon the product of the human mind for its appearance."

My pride in this analysis was short lived.

"Wait a minute, Goodwin," said O'Keefe. "Do you mean to say you think that this thing is made of—well, of moonshine?"

"Moonlight," I replied, "is, of course, reflected sunlight. But the rays which pass back to earth after their impact on the moon's surface are profoundly changed. The spectroscope shows that they lose practically all the slower vibrations we call red and infra-red, while the extremely rapid vibrations we call the violet and ultra-violet are accelerated and altered. Many scientists hold that there is an unknown element in the moon—perhaps that which makes the gigantic luminous trails that radiate in all directions from the lunar crater Tycho—whose energies are absorbed by and carried on the moon rays.

"At any rate, whether by the loss of the vibrations of the red or by the addition of this mysterious force, the light of the moon becomes something entirely different from mere modified sunlight—just as the addition or subtraction of one other chemical in a compound of several makes the product a substance with entirely different energies and potentialities.

"Now these rays are given perhaps still another mysterious activity by the transparent globes through which Throckmartin told me they passed in the Chamber of the Moon Pool and whose colors they take. The result is the necessary factor in the formation of the Dweller. There would be nothing scientifically improbable in such a process, Larry.

"We know the extraordinary effect of the Finsen rays, which are only the concentration of the chemical energies in the green and blue of the spectrum, upon malignant cell growths in the human body; and we know that the X-ray can dissolve the normal barrier of matter for us, making the solid transparent. We do not begin to know how to harness the potentialities of light. This hidden race may have learned; and learning, may have created forms with powers undreamed by us."

"LISTEN, Doc," said Larry earnestly, "I'll take everything you say about this lost continent, the people who used to live on it, and their caverns, for granted. But by the sword of Brian Boru, you'll never get me to fall for the idea that a bunch of moonshine can handle a big woman such as you say Throckmartin's Thora was, nor a two-fisted man such as you say Throckmartin was. You'll never get me to believe that any bunch of concentrated moonshine could handle them and take them waltzing off along a moonbeam back to wherever it goes. No, Doc, not on your life."

"I've told you that what you call moonshine is an aggregate of vibrations with immense potential power, Larry," I answered, considerably irritated. "What we call matter is nothing but a collection of infinitely small particles of electricity—electrons; and the way the electrons are grouped makes of matter man or wood or metal or stone. Light is a magnetic vibration of the ether and is probably composed of similar particles of electricity but functioning in another way from the particles that make matter. Learn the secret of making light and you come close to learning the secret of matter.

"Why, if you could take all the energy out of the sunshine that in one minute covers one square foot of earth, you could blast all the earth to bits. And your wonderful radio is nothing but vibrations, yet it carries words around the world with almost the speed of light itself—"

"No," he interrupted. "You're wrong."

"All right O'Keefe," I answered, now very much irritated indeed. "What's your theory?" And I could not resist adding: "Fairies?"

"Professor," he grinned, "if it's a fairy

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it's Irish and when it sees me it'll be so glad there'll be nothing to it. 'I was lost, strayed or stolen, Larry avick,' it'll say, 'an' I was so homesick for the old sod I was desp'rit,' it'll say, 'an' take me back quick before I do any more har-rm!' It'll tell me—an' that's the truth."

I forgot my chagrin in our laughter.

"But I'll tell you what I think," he said soberly. "Back at the first battle of the Marne, there were any number of Englishmen who thought they saw the old archers of Crecy and Agincourt, dead these half dozen centuries, twanging phantom bows and shooting down the enemy by the hundred. And you can find thousands of Frenchmen who saw Joan of Arc and Napoleon regularly. It's what the doctors call collective hallucination. Somebody sees something a little queer; his imagination gets to work hard because his nerves are pretty well strained anyway, he says to the next fellow: 'Don't you see it?' and the next fellow says, 'Sure I see it, too!' And there you are—bowmen of Mons, St. George on his white horse, Joan in armor, and all the rest of it."

"If you think that explains Throckmartin and myself, how do you explain Huldricksson, who never saw Throckmartin and didn't see me before the Thing came to the *Brunhilda?*" I asked with, I admit, some heat.

"Now don't get me wrong," replied Larry. "I believe you all saw something all right. But what I think you saw was some kind of gas. All this region is volcanic and islands and things are constantly poking up from the sea. It's probably gas; a volcanic emanation; something new to us and that drives you crazy—lots of kinds of gas do that.

"It hit the Throckmartin party on that island and they probably were all more or less delirious all the time; thought they saw things; talked it over and—collective hallucination. When they got it bad they most likely jumped overboard one by one. Huldricksson sails into a place where it is and it hits his wife. She grabs the child and jumps overboard. Maybe the moon rays make it luminous."

"But that doesn't explain the moon door and the phenomena of the lights in the Chamber of the Pool," I said at last.

"You haven't seen them, have you?" asked Larry. "And Throckmartin admitted he was pretty nearly crazy when he thought he did. Well!"

For a time I was silent.

"Larry," I said at last, "whether you are right or I am right, I must go to the Nan-Matal. Will you go with me, Larry?

"Goodwin," he replied, "I surely will. I'm as interested as you are. If I'm reported dead for a while, there's nobody to care. So that's all right. Only, old man, be reasonable. You've thought over this so long, you're going bugs, honestly you are."

And again, the gladness that I might have Larry O'Keefe with me, was so great that I forgot to be angry.

DA COSTA, who had come aboard unnoticed by either of us, now tapped me on the arm.

"Doctair Goodwin," he said, "can I see you in my cabin, sair?"

At last, then, he was going to speak. I followed him.

"Doctair," he said, when we had entered, "this is a veree strange thing that has happened to Olaf. Veree strange. An' the natives of Ponape, they have been very much excite' lately. An' none go near the Nan-Matal now, for they say the spirits have got great power and are angree because of that othair partee which they take.

"Of what they fear I know nothing, nothing!" Again that quick, furtive crossing of himself. "But this I have to tell you. There came to me from Ranaloa last month a man, a German, a doctair, like you. His name it was Von Hetzdorp. I take him to Ponape an' the natives there, they will not take him to the Nan-Matal, where he wish to go. So I take him. We leave in a boat, with much instrument carefully tied up. I leave him there wit' the boat an' the food. He tell me to tell no one an' pay me not to. But you are a friend an' Olaf he depend much upon you an' so I tell you, sair."

"You know nothing more than this, Da Costa?" I asked. "You're sure?"

"Nothing! Nothing more!" he answered. But I was not so sure. Later I told O'Keefe.

The next morning we raised Ponape, without further incident, and before noon the *Suwarna* and the *Brunhilda* had dropped anchor in the harbor. Upon the excitement and manifest dread of the natives, when we sought among them for carriers and workmen to accompany us, I will not dwell. No payment we offered would induce a single one of them to go to the Nan-Matal. Nor would they say why.

They were sullen and panicky, and I think the most disconcerting thing of all

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in their attitude, was the open relief they showed when they learned that a British warship might steam in, seeking O'Keefe. It indicated that their fear was deep-rooted and real, indeed.

We piled the longboat up with my instruments and food and camping equipment. The *Suwarna* took us around to Metalanim Harbor, and there, with the tops of ancient sea walls deep in the blue water beneath us, and the ruins looming up out of the mangroves, a scant mile from us, left us.

Da Costa's anxiety and uneasiness were almost pitiful. There were tears in the eyes of the little Portuguese when he bade us farewell, invoking all the saints to stand by and protect us; and the sorrow in his face and the fervor of his parting grip were eloquent of his conviction that never again would he behold us.

Then, with Huldricksson manipulating our small sail and Larry at the rudder, we rounded the titanic wall that swept down into the depths, passed monoliths, standing like gigantic sentinels upon its shattered verge. We turned at last into the canal that Throckmartin, on his map, had marked as the passage which led straight to that place of ancient mysteries where the moon door is portal of that dread chamber wherein the Dweller made itself manifest.

And as we entered that channel we were enveloped by a silence; a silence so intense, so weighted, that it seemed to have substance; an alien silence that clung and stifled and still stood aloof from us, the living.

Standing down in the chambered depths of the Great Pyramid I had known something of such silence, but never such intensity as this. Larry felt it and I saw him look at me askance. If Olaf, sitting in the bow, felt it, too, he gave no sign. His blue eyes, with again the glint of ice within them watched the channel before us.

As we passed, there arose upon our left sheer walls of black basalt blocks, cyclopean, towering fifty feet or more, broken here and there by the sinking of their deep foundations. And only where they had so broken, had the hand of time been able to crumble them. From these dark ramparts the silence seemed to ooze, and my skin crept as though from hidden places in them scores of eyes, ages dead, peered out at us, like ghosts of a lost Atlantis.

In front of us the mangroves widened out and filled the canal. On our right the lesser walls of Tau, somber blocks smoothed and squared and set with a cold, mathematical nicety, that filled me with vague awe, slipped by. Through breaks I caught glimpses of dark ruins and of great fallen stones that seemed to crouch and menace us as we passed. Somewhere there, hidden, were the seven globes that poured the moon fire down upon the Moon Pool.

Now we were among the mangroves and, sail down, the three of us pushed and pulled the boat through their tangled roots and branches. The noise of our passing split the silence, like a profanation, and from the ancient bastions came murmurs —forbidding, strangely sinister. And now we were through, floating on a little open space of shadow-filled water. Before us lifted the gateway of Nan-Tanach, gigantic, broken, incredibly old. Shattered portals through which had passed men and women of earth's dawn; old with a weight of years that pressed leadenly upon the eyes that looked upon it, and yet in some curious, indefinable way—menacingly defiant.

Beyond the gate, back from the portals, stretched a flight of enormous basalt slabs, a giant's stairway indeed; and from each side of it marched the high walls that were the Dweller's pathway. None of us spoke as we grounded the boat and dragged it up upon a half-submerged pier.

"What next?" whispered Larry, at last.

"I think we ought to take a look around," I replied in the same low tones. "We'll climb the wall here and take a flash about. The whole place ought to be plain as day from that height."

Huldricksson, his blue eyes now alert, nodded. With the greatest of difficulty we clambered up the broken blocks, the giant Norseman at times lifting me like a child, and stood at last upon the broad top. From this vantage-point, not only the whole of Nan-Tanach, but all of the Nan-Matal lay at our feet.

TO THE east and south of us, set like children's blocks in the midst of the sapphire sea, were dozens of islets, none of them covering more than two square miles of surface; each of them a perfect square or oblong within its protecting walls. Behind these walls were grouped ruins—houses, temples, palaces, all the varying abodes of men. On none was there sign of life, save for a few great birds that hovered here and there and gulls dipping in the blue waves beyond.

We turned our gaze down upon the

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Once, twice, three times, she pressed upon the flower centers. . . .

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island on which we stood. It was, I estimated, about three-quarters of a mile square. The sea wall enclosed it like the sides of a gigantic box. It was really an enormous basalt-sided open cube, and within it two other open cubes. The enclosure between the first and second wall was stone paved, with here and there a broken pillar and long stone benches.

The hibiscus, the aloe-tree and a number of small shrubs had found place, but seemed only to intensify its stark loneliness. It came to me that this had been the assembling place of those who, thousands upon thousands of years ago, had gathered within this citadel of mystery. Beyond the wall that was its farther boundary was a second enclosure, littered with broken pillars, fragments of stone and numerous small structures; and the second enclosure's limit was the third wall, a terrace not more than twenty feet high. Within it was what had been without doubt the heart of Nan-Tanach—an open space three hundred feet square; at each of its corners a temple.

Directly before us, black and staring like an eyeless socket, was the entrance to the "treasure-house of Chau-ta-Leur" the sun king. The blocks that had formed its doors lay shattered beside it. And opposite it should be, if Throckmartin's story had not been a dream, the gray slab he had named the moon door.

"Wonder where the German fellow can be?" asked Larry.

I shook my head. There was no sign of life here. Had Von Hetzdorp gone, or had the Dweller taken him, too? Whatever had happened, there was no trace of him below us or on any of the islets within our range of vision. We scrambled down the side of the gateway. Olaf looked at me wistfully.

"We start the search now, Olaf," I said. "And first, O'Keefe, let us see whether the gray stone is really here. After that we will set up camp, and while I unpack, you and Olaf search the island. It won't take long."

Larry gave a look at his service automatic and grinned. We made our way up the steps, through the outer enclosures and into the central square. I confess to a fire of scientific curiosity and eagerness tinged with a dread that O'Keefe's analysis might be true. Would we find the moving slab and, if so, would it be as Throckmartin had described? If so, then even Larry would have to admit that here was something that theories of gases and luminous emanations would not explain; and the first test of the whole amazing story would be passed. But if not—

And there before us, the faintest tinge of gray setting it apart from its neighboring blocks of basalt, was the moon door!

There was no mistaking it. This was, in very deed, the portal through which Dr. Throckmartin had seen pass that gloriously dreadful apparition he called the Dweller; through it the Dweller had borne in an embrace of living light first Thora, Mrs. Throckmartin's maid, and then Dr. Stanton, his youthful colleague. And through it at last had gone Throckmartin, down the shining tunnel beyond, whose luminous lure led to that enchanted chamber into which streamed the seven moon torrents that drew the Dweller from the wondrous pool that was its lair.

Across its threshold had raced Edith Throckmartin, my lost friend's young bride, fearlessly flying down that haunted passage to aid her husband in his fruitless fight against the Thing—and out of it he himself had rushed, a merciful darkness shrouding consciousness and sight, after he had watched her sink, slowly sink, down through the blue waters of the moon pool, wrapped in the Dweller's coruscating folds, to—what?

And then there seemed to drift out through the stone to face me that inexplicable being of swirling, spiraling plumes and jets of sparkling opalescence, of crystal sweet chimings, of murmuring sighings that Throckmartin had told me stamped upon the faces of its prey wedded anguish and rapture, terror and ecstasy commingled, joy of heaven and agony of hell, the seal of God and devil monstrously mated. The Thing that my own eyes had seen clasp Throckmartin in our cabin of the *Southern Queen* and draw him swiftly down the moon path.

What was that portal, more enigmatic than was ever sphinx? And what lay beyond it? What did that smooth stone, whose wan deadness whispered of ages old corridors of time opening out into alien, unimaginable vistas, hide? It had cost the world of science Throckmartin's great brain, as it had cost Throckmartin those he loved. It had drawn me to it in search of Throckmartin, and its shadow had fallen upon the soul of Olaf the Norseman; and upon what thousands upon thousands more, I wondered, since the brains that had conceived it had vanished?

Did the Dweller lurk behind it in wait for us? When we found its open-sesame

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would we find within truths of our world's youth to which the riches of Ali Baba's cave were but dross? Was there that within which would force science to recast its hard won theories of humanity, of its evolution, of its painful progress from brute to what we call man? Or would we loose upon the world some nameless, blasting evil, some survival of our planet's nightmare hours, some supernormal, inhuman thing spawned by unthinkable travail in a hidden cavern of mother earth?

A barrier of unknown stone—fifteen feet high and ten feet wide; and yet it might bar the way to a lost paradise or hold back a hell undreamed by even cruelest brains! What lay beyond it?

SWIFTLY the thoughts raced through my mind as I stood staring at the gray slab and then through me passed a wave of weakness. And not until then did I realize the intense, subconscious anxiety that had possessed me.

I stretched out a shaking hand and touched the surface of the slab. A faint thrill passed through my hand and arm, oddly unfamiliar and as oddly pleasant; as of electric contact holding the very essence of cold. O'Keefe, watching, imitated my action. As his fingers rested on the stone his face filled with astonishment. In Huldricksson's eyes was mingled hope and despair. I beckoned him; he laid a hand on the slab and swiftly withdrew it. But I saw the despair die from his face, leaving only eagerness, a sudden hope.

"It is the door!" he said. I nodded. There was a low whistle of astonishment from O'Keefe and he pointed up toward the top of the gray stone. I followed the gesture and saw, above the moon door and on each side of it, two gently curving bosses of rock, perhaps a foot in diameter.

"The moon door's keys," I said.

"It begins to look so," answered Larry. "If we can find them," he added.

"There's nothing we can do till moonrise," I replied. "And we've none too much time to prepare as it is. Come!"

But stark lonely as was that place, I felt, as we passed out, as though eyes were upon me, watching with an intensity of malevolence, a bitter hatred. Olaf must have felt it, too, for I saw him glance sharply around and his face hardened. I said nothing, however, nor did he; and a little later we were beside our boat. We lightered it, set up the tent, and as it was now but a short hour to sundown I told them to leave me and make their search. They went off together, and I busied myself with opening some of the paraphernalia I had brought with me.

First of all I took out two Becquerel ray-condensers that I had bought in New York. Their lenses would collect and intensify to the fullest extent any light directed upon them. I had found them most useful in making spectroscopic analysis of luminous vapors, and I knew that at Yerkes Observatory splendid results had been obtained from them in collecting the diffused radiance of the nebulae for the same purpose.

It was my theory that the mechanism operating the moon door responded only to the force of the full light of the moon shining through the seven little circles which Throckmartin had discovered set within each of the bosses above it; just as the Dweller could materialize only under the same full-moon force shining through the varicolored lights. Obviously the time, then, of the door's opening and the phenomenon's materialization must coincide.

With the moon only a few days past its full, it was practically certain that by setting the Becquerel condensers above the bosses I could concentrate enough light upon the circles to set the opening mechanism in motion. And as the ray stream from the waning moon was insufficient to energize the pool, we could enter the chamber free from any fear of encountering its tenant, make our preliminary observations and go forth before the satellite had dropped so far that the concentration in the condensers would fall below that necessary to keep the slab from closing.

I took out also a small spectroscope, easily carried, and a few other small instruments for the analysis of certain light manifestations and the testing of metal and liquid. Finally, I put aside my emergency medical kit.

I had hardly finished examining and adjusting these before O'Keefe and Huldricksson returned. They reported signs of a camp at least ten days old beside the northern wall of the outer court, but beyond that no evidence of others beyond ourselves on Nan-Tanach. Moonrise would not occur until nine-thirty, and until then there was no use of attacking the moon door.

We prepared supper, ate and talked a little, but for the most part were silent. Even Larry's high spirits were not in evidence; half a dozen times I saw him take out his automatic and look it over. He was more thoughtful than I had ever seen

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him. Once he went into the tent, rummaged about a bit and brought out another revolver which, he said, he had got from Da Costa, and a half-dozen clips of cartridges. He passed the gun to Olaf.

At last a glow in the southeast heralded the rising moon. I picked up my instruments and the medical kit; Larry and Olaf shouldered each a short ladder that was part of my equipment. With our electric flashes pointing the way, we walked up the great stairs, through the enclosures, and straight to the gray stone.

By this time the moon had risen and its clipped light shone full upon the slab. I saw faint gleams pass over it as of fleeting phosphorescence, but so faint were they that I could not be sure of the truth of my observation. The base of the gray stone bisected a curious cuplike depression whose perfectly rounded sides were as smooth as though they had been polished by a jeweler. This half cup was, at its deepest, two and a half feet, and its lip joined the basalt pavement four feet from the barrier of the great slab.

WE SET the ladders in place. Olaf I assigned to stand before the door and watch for the first signs of its opening—if open it should—and the big sailor accepted the post eagerly, thinking, I suppose, that it would bring him nearer the loved ones he now was sure were within. The Becquerals were set within three-inch tripods, whose feet I had equipped with vacuum rings to enable them to hold fast to the rock.

I scaled one ladder and fastened a condenser over the boss; descended; sent Larry up to watch it, and, ascending the second ladder, rapidly fixed the other in its place. Then, with O'Keefe watchful on his perch, I on mine and Olaf's eyes fixed upon the moon door, we began our vigil. Suddenly there was an exclamation from Larry.

"Seven little lights are beginning to glow on this stone, Goodwin!" he cried.

But I had already seen those beneath my lens begin to gleam out with a silvery luster. Swiftly the rays within the condenser began to thicken and increase, and as they did so the seven small circles waxed like stars growing out of the dusk, and with a queer—curdled is the best word I can find to define it—luster entirely strange to me.

I placed a finger upon one of them and received a shock such as I had felt on touching the moon door, only greatly intensified. Clearly a current of some kind was set up within the substance when the moonlight fell upon it. And now the lights were glowing steadily. Beneath me I heard a faint, sighing murmur and then the voice of Huldricksson:

"It opens—the stone turns—"

I began to climb down the ladder. Again came Olaf's voice:

"The stone—it is open—" And then a shriek that came from the very core of his heart; a wail of blended anguish and pity, of rage and despair—and the sound of swift footsteps racing through the wall beneath me!

I dropped to the ground. The moon door was wide open, and through it I caught a glimpse of a corridor filled with a faint, pearly vaporous light like earliest misty dawn. But of Olaf I could see nothing! And even as I stood, gaping, from behind me came the sharp crack of a rifle. I saw the glass of the condenser at Larry's side flash and fly into fragments; saw him drop swiftly to the ground and the automatic in his hand flash once, twice, into the darkness.

Saw, too, the moon door begin to pivot slowly, slowly back into its place!

I rushed toward the turning stone with the wild idea of holding it open. As I thrust my hands against it there came at my back a snarl and an oath and Larry staggered under the impact of a body that had flung itself straight at his throat. He reeled at the lip of the shallow cup at the base of the slab, slipped upon its polished curve, fell and rolled with that which had attacked him, kicking and writhing, straight through the narrowing portal into the mistily luminous passage!

Forgetting all else, I sprang with a cry to his aid. And as I leaped I felt the closing edge of the moon door graze my side. And then, as Larry raised a fist, brought it down upon the temple of the man who had grappled with him and rose from the twitching body unsteadily to his feet, I heard shuddering past me a mournful whisper; spun about as though some giant hand had whirled me—and stood so, rigid, appalled!

For the end of the corridor no longer opened out into the moonlit square of ruined Nan-Tanach. It was barred by a solid mass of glimmering stone. The moon door had closed!

And where was Olaf Huldricksson? And who was the man at our feet who had brought this calamity down upon us? And what were we to do, prisoned, and my

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bewildered brain told me, hopelessly prisoned, without food, in the very lair of the Dweller itself?

CHAPTER IV

THE MOON POOL

"LARRY!" I cried, turning to O'Keefe, "the stone has shut! We're caught!"

O'Keefe took a brisk step toward the barrier behind us. There was no mark of juncture with the shining walls; the slab fitted into the sides as closely as a mosaic.

"It's shut all right," said Larry. "But if there's a way in, there's a way out. Anyway, Doc, we're right in the pew we've been heading for, so why worry?" He grinned at me cheerfully, and although I could not accept his light-hearted view of situation, I felt a twinge of shame for my momentary panic. The man on the floor groaned, and O'Keefe dropped swiftly to his knees beside him.

"Von Hetzdorp!" he said.

At my exclamation he moved aside, turning the face so I could see it. It was clearly German, and just as clearly its possessor was a man of considerable force and intellectuality.

The strong, massive brow with orbital ridge unusually developed, the dominant high-bridged nose, the straight lips with their more than suggestion of latent cruelty, and the strong lines of the jaw beneath a black, pointed beard all gave evidence that here was a personality beyond the ordinary. The hair was closely cropped on the square head, and the short, stocky body with its deep chest and abnormal length of torso as compared to the legs, indicated extraordinary vitality.

Unscrupulous, I thought, looking down upon him, remorseless, crafty, and with a brain as unmoral as is science itself.

"Got another one of those condensers the Heinie here broke?" Larry asked me suddenly. "And do you suppose Olaf will know enough to use it?"

And then it dawned upon me that O'Keefe could not have heard, as I had, the Norseman race into the moon door's passage before the door had closed! I arose swiftly.

"Larry," I answered, "Olaf's not outside! He's in here somewhere!"

His jaw dropped.

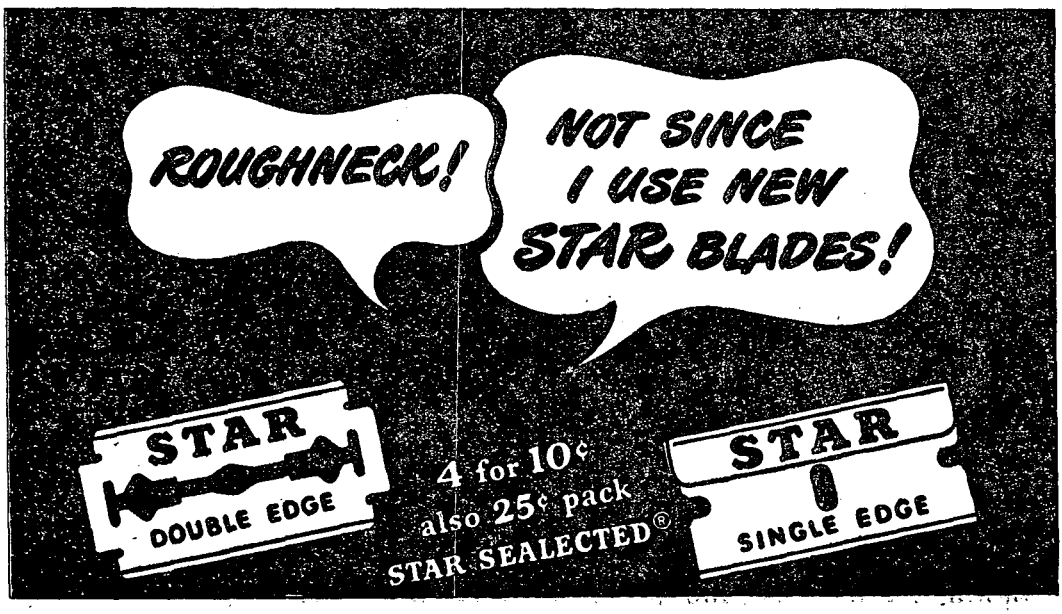
"Didn't you hear him shriek when the stone opened?" I asked.

"I heard him yell, yes," he said. "But I didn't know what was the matter. And then this wildcat jumped me—" He paused and his eyes widened. "Which way did he go?" he asked swiftly. I pointed down the faintly glowing passage.

"There's only one way," I said.

"Watch that bird close," hissed O'Keefe, pointing to Von Hetzdorp—and pistol in hand stretched his long legs and raced away. I looked down at the German. His eyes were open and he reached out a hand to me. I lifted him to his feet.

"I have heard," he said. "We follow quick. If you will take my arm, please, I am shaken yet, yes—" I gripped his shoul-



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der without a word, and the two of us set off down the corridor after Larry. Von Hetzdorp was gasping, and his weight pressed upon me heavily, but he moved with all the will and strength that was in him.

As we ran I took hasty note of the tunnel. I saw that its sides were smooth and polished, and that the light seemed to come not from their surfaces, but from far within them—giving to the walls an illusive aspect of distance and depth; rendering them spacious in a peculiarly weird way. The passage turned, twisted, ran down, turned again. It came to me that the light that illumined the tunnel was given out by tiny points deep within the stone, sprang from the points rippingly and spread upon their polished faces. Involuntarily I stopped to look more closely.

"Hurry," gasped Von Hetzdorp. "Explain that later—etheric vibration—set up in that composition—stones really etheric lights—stupendous! Hurry!"

Through his panting speech broke a cry from far ahead. It was Larry's voice.

"Olaf!"

I gripped Von Hetzdorp's arm closer and we sped on. Now we were coming fast to the end of the passage. Before us was a high arch, and through it I glimpsed a dim, shifting luminosity as of mist filled with rainbows. We reached the portal and I drew myself up short, almost tripping the German. For what I was looking into was a chamber that might have been transported from that enchanted palace of the Jinn King that rises beyond the magic mountains of Kaf.

It was filled with a shimmering, prismatic lambency that thickened in the distances to impenetrable veils of fairy opalescence. It was a shrine of sorcery!

Before me stood O'Keefe, and a dozen feet in front of him, Huldricksson, with something clasped tightly in his arms. The Norseman's feet were at the verge of a shining, silvery lip of stone within whose oval lay a blue pool. And down upon this pool staring upward like a gigantic eye, fell seven pillars of fantom light—one of them amethyst, one of rose, another of white, a fourth of blue, and three of emerald, of silver and of amber. They fell each upon the azure surface, and I knew that these were the seven streams of radiance, within which the Dweller took shape—now but pale ghosts of their brilliancy when the full energy of the moon stream raced through them.

Then Huldricksson bent and placed on the shining silver lip of the Pool that which he held, and I saw that it was the body of a child! He set it there so gently, bent over the side and thrust a hand down into the water. And as he did so he stiffened strangely, moaned and lurched against the little body that lay before him. Instantly the form moved, and slipped over the verge into the blue. Rigid with horror, I watched Huldricksson recover himself and throw his body over the stone, hands clutching, arms thrust deep down. And then I heard from his lips a long-drawn, heart-shriveling cry of pain and of anguish that held in it nothing human!

Close on its wake came a cry from Von Hetzdorp.

"Gott!" shrieked the German. "Drag him back! Quick!"

He leaped forward, but before he could half clear the distance, O'Keefe had leaped, too, had caught the Norseman by the shoulders and toppled him backward, where he lay whimpering and sobbing. And as I rushed behind the German I saw Larry lean over the lip of the Pool and cover his eyes with a shaking hand; saw Von Hetzdorp peer down into it with real pity in his cold eyes; heard him murmur, *"Das armes Kind! Ach! das armes Kleine Mädchen!"*

THEN I stared down, myself, into the Moon Pool, and there, sinking, sinking, was a little maid whose dead face and fixed, terror-filled eyes looked straight into mine; and ever sinking slowly, slowly—vanished! And I knew that this was Olaf's Freda, his beloved *"yndling"* whose mother had snatched her up from the *Brunhilda's* deck when the Dweller had wrapped its awesome, coruscating folds about her, and had drawn her, the child still in her arms, along the moonbeam path to where we stood.

But where was the mother, and where had Olaf found his babe?

Simultaneously, it seemed, we straightened ourselves, the three of us, and looked into each other's faces; each of us, yes, even Von Hetzdorp, shaken to the heart. The German was first to speak.

"You have nitroglycerin there, yes?" he asked, pointing toward my medical kit that I had gripped unconsciously and carried with me during the mad rush down the passage. I nodded and drew it out.

"Hypodermic," he ordered next, curtly; took the syringe, filled it accurately with its one one-hundredth of a grain dosage;

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and leaned over Huldricksson, who, with arms held out rigidly, was fighting for breath as though a great weight lay on his chest. He rolled up the sailor's sleeves halfway to the shoulder. The arms were white with that same strange semitranslucence that I had seen on Throckmartin's breast where a tendril of the Dweller had touched him. His hands were of the same whiteness—like a baroque pearl. Above the line of white, standing out like marble on the bronzed arms, Von Hetzdorp thrust the needle.

"He will need all his heart can do," he said to me.

Then he reached down into a belt about his waist and drew from it a small, flat flask of what seemed to be lead. He opened it and let a few drops of its contents fall on each arm of the Norwegian. The liquid sparkled and instantly began to spread over the skin much as oil or gasoline dropped on water does, only far more rapidly. And as it spread it seemed to draw a sparkling film over the tainted flesh and little wisps of vapor rose from it.

The Norseman's mighty chest heaved with agony, and I could see the overstimulated heart beating in a great pulse in his throat. He strove to rise to his feet, but his weakness was too great. His hands clenched. The German gave a grunt of satisfaction at this, dropped a little more of the liquid, and then, watching closely, grunted again and leaned back. Huldricksson's labored breathing ceased, his head dropped upon Larry's knee, and from his arms and hands the whiteness swiftly withdrew.

Von Hetzdorp arose and contemplated us, almost benevolently.

"He will all right be in five minutes," he said. "I know. I do it to pay for that shot of mine, and also because we will need him. Yes." He turned to Larry. "You have a poonch like a mule kick, my young friend," he said. "Some time you pay me for that shot, eh?" He smiled; and the quality of the grimace was not exactly reassuring. Larry looked him over quizzically.

"You're Von Hetzdorp, of course," he said. The German nodded, betraying no surprise at the recognition.

"And you?" he asked.

"Lieutenant O'Keefe of the Royal Flying Corps," replied Larry, saluting. "And this gentleman is Dr. Walter T. Goodwin."

Von Hetzdorp's face brightened.

"The American botanist?" he queried. I nodded.

"Ach!" cried Von Hetzdorp eagerly; "but this is fortunate. Long I have desired to meet you. Your work, for an American, is most excellent; surprising—"

Huldricksson interrupted him. The big seaman had risen stiffly to his feet and stood with Larry's arm supporting him. He stretched out his hands to me.

"I saw her," he whispered. "I saw mine Freda when the stone swung. She lay there, just at my feet. I picked her up and I saw that mine Freda was dead. But I hoped—and I thought maybe mine Helma was somewhere here, too. So I ran with mine *yndling*, here—" His voice broke.

"I thought maybe she was not dead," he went on. "And I saw that." He pointed to the Moon Pool. "And I thought I would bathe her face and she might live again. And when I dipped my hands within, the life left them, and cold, deadly cold, ran up through them into my heart. And mine Freda she fell." He covered his eyes, and dropping his head on O'Keefe's shoulder, stood, racked by sobs that seemed to tear at his very soul.

VON HETZDORP nodded his head solemnly as Olaf finished.

"*Ja!*" he said. "That which comes from here took them both—the woman and the child. *Ja!* They came clasped within it and the stone shut upon them. But why it left the child behind I do not understand."

Larry was watching him, in his eyes incredulous indignation and amazement.

"You, too, try to tell me that something carried a woman and a child from a ship hundreds of miles away, through the air over the seas to here?" he cried, an edge of contempt in his voice. "Something that Dr. Goodwin has said is made of—moonshine—carried a strong woman and a child. How do you know?"

"Because I saw it," answered Von Hetzdorp simply. "Not only did I see it, but hardly had I time to make escape through the entrance before it passed whirling and murmuring and its bell sounds all joyous. *Ja!* It was what you call the squeak close, that."

"Wait a moment," I said, stilling Larry with a gesture. "Do I understand you to say that you were within this place?"

Von Hetzdorp actually beamed upon me.

"*Ja,* Dr. Goodwin," he said, "I went in when that which comes from it went out!

"Now," he said, "to prove my good faith I will tell you what I know. Something I knew of what was occurring here before I was sent"—he corrected himself hurriedly

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—"before I came. I found the secret of the door mechanism even as you did, Dr. Goodwin. But by carelessness, my condensers were broken. I was forced to wait while I sent for others, and the waiting might be for months. I took certain precautions, and on the first night of this full moon I hid myself within the vault of Chau-ta-leur. There is"—he hesitated—"there is a something there also which I do not quite understand that—protects. But I did not know this when I first hid myself, *nein!* All I thought was that I could see from there and perhaps come through."

An involuntary thrill of respect for the man went through me at the manifest heroism of this leap of his in the dark. I could see it reflected in Larry's face.

"I hid in the vault," continued Von Hetzdorp, "and I saw that which comes from here come out. I waited long hours. At last, when the moon was low, I saw it return—ecstatically—with a man, a native, in embrace enfolded. It passed through the door, and soon then the moon became low and the door closed. I had found it difficult, and had it not been for whatever it is of protection there in the vault—" He hesitated again, perplexedly.

"The next night," he went on, "more confidence was mine, yes. And after that which comes had gone, I looked through its open door. I said, 'It will not return for three hours. While it is away, why shall I not into its home go through the door it has left open?' So I went—even to here. I looked at the pillars of light and I tested the liquid of the Pool on which they fell, and what I found led me to believe the shape of light emerged from there."

I started. Evidently then, he did not know just how the Dweller materialized from the Pool. He saw my movement and interpreted it correctly.

"You know how it comes?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes," I answered. "Later, I will tell you."

"I analyzed that liquid," he went on, "and then I knew I had been right in one phase at least of my theory. That liquid, Dr. Goodwin, is not water, and it is not any fluid known on earth." He handed me a small vial, its neck held in a long thong.

"Take this," he said, "and see."

Wonderingly, I took the bottle; dipped it down into the Pool. The liquid was extraordinarily light; seemed, in fact, to give the vial buoyancy. I held it to the light. It was striated, streaked, as though little living, pulsing veins ran through it. And its blueness even in the vial, held an intensity of luminousness.

"Radioactive," said Von Hetzdorp. "Some liquid that is intensely radioactive; but what it is I know not at all. Upon the living skin it acts like radium raised to the nth power and with an element most mysterious added. The solution with which I treated him," he pointed to Huldricksson, "I had prepared before I came here, from information I had of what I might find. It is largely salts of radium, and its base is Loeb's formula for the neutralization of radium and X-ray burns. Taking this man at once, before the degeneration had become really active, I could negative it. But after two hours I could have done nothing." He paused a moment.

"Next I studied the nature of these luminous walls. I concluded that whoever had made them, knew the secret of the Almighty's manufacture of light from the ether itself. Colossal! *Ja!* But the substance of these blocks confines an atomic—how would you say?—atomic manipulation, a conscious arrangement of electrons, light-emitting, and perhaps indefinitely so. These blocks are lamps in which oil and wick are—electrons drawing light waves from ether itself! A Prometheus, indeed, this discoverer! *Hein!* Hardly had I concluded these investigations before my watch warned me to go. I went. That which comes forth returned, this time empty-handed.

"And the next night I did the same thing. Engrossed in research, I let the moments go by to the danger point, and scarcely was I replaced within the vault when the shining thing raced over the walls, and in its grip the woman and child. Then you came, and that is all. And now, what is it you know?"

Very briefly I went over my story. His eyes gleamed now and then, but he did not interrupt me.

"A great secret! A colossal secret!" he said at last. "We cannot leave it hidden."

"The first thing to do is to try the door," said Larry, matter of fact.

"There is no use, my young friend," said Von Hetzdorp mildly.

"Nevertheless we'll try," said Larry.

We retraced our way through the winding tunnel to the end, but soon even O'Keefe saw that any idea of moving the slab from within was hopeless. We returned to the Chamber of the Pool. The pillars of light were fainter, and we knew that the moon was sinking. On the world outside before long dawn would be break-

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ing. I began to feel thirst, and the blue semblance of water within the silvery room seemed to glint mockingly as my eyes rested on it.

"Ja!" said Von Hetzdorp, reading my thoughts uncannily. *"Ja!* We will be thirsty. And it will be very bad for him of us who loses control and drinks of that, my friend!"

Larry threw back his shoulders as though shaking a burden from them.

"We're four able-bodied men up against a bunch of moonshine and a lot of dead ones. Buck up, for Heaven's sake!"

"Do you suggest that we poonch our way out?" asked Von Hetzdorp mildly.

"Forget that, professor," answered Larry almost testily. "I suggest that we look around this place and find something that will take us somewhere. You can bet the people that built it had more ways of getting in than that once-a-month family entrance. Doc, you and Olaf explore the left wall; the professor and I will take the right."

THE chamber widened out from the portal in what seemed to be the arc of an immense circle. The shining walls held a perceptible curve, and from this curvature I estimated that the roof was fully three hundred feet above us. It occurred to me that perhaps the Chamber of the Pool was shaped like half a hollow sphere, an inverted bowl. As we silently passed on, I was confirmed in this belief, for clearly we were circling. If I were right, the circumference of the place, reckoning the radius at three hundred feet, must be one thousand eight hundred feet, or a little less than a third of a mile.

The floor was of smooth, mosaic-fitted blocks of a faintly yellow tinge. They were not light-emitting like the blocks that formed the walls. The radiance from these latter, I noted, had the peculiar quality of thickening a few yards from its source, and it was this that produced the effect of misty, veiled distances. As we walked, the seven columns of rays streaming down from the crystalline globes high above us waned steadily; the glow within the chamber lost its prismatic shimmer and became an even gray tone somewhat like moonlight in a thin cloud.

Now before us, out from the wall, jutted a low terrace. It was all of a pearly rose-colored stone, and above it, like a balustrade, marched a row of slender, graceful pillars of the same hue. The face of the terrace was about ten feet high, and all over it ran a bas-relief of what looked like short trailing vines, surmounted by five stalks, on the tip of each of which was a flower. Behind the vines ran a design of semiglobes from which branched delicate tendrils. I did not recognize the carved flowers; they were, I thought, some symbolization in which the true form of the original had been lost.

How then could I have known the incredible thing which these stones pictured!

We passed along the terrace. It turned in an abrupt curve. I heard a hail, and there, fifty feet away, at the curving end of a wall identical with that where we stood, were Larry and Von Hetzdorp. Obviously the left side of the chamber was a duplicate of that we had explored. We joined. In front of us the columned barriers ran back a hundred feet, forming an alcove. The end of this alcove was another wall of the same rose stone, but upon it the design was much heavier.

We took a step forward, and then stopped, every muscle rigid. There was a gasp of terrified awe from the Norsemen, a guttural exclamation from Von Hetzdorp. For on, or rather within, the wall before us, a great oval began to glow, waxed almost to a flame, and then shone steadily out as though from behind it a

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light was streaming through the stone itself!

Within the roseate oval two flame-tipped shadows appeared, stood for a moment, and then seemed to float out upon it surface. The shadows wavered; the tips of flame that nimbused them with flickering points of violet and vermilion pulsed outward, drew back, darted forth again, and once more withdrew themselves. And as they did so the shadows thickened, and suddenly there before us stood two figures!

One was a girl—a girl whose great eyes were golden as the fabled lilies of Kwan-Yung that were born of the kiss of the sun upon the amber goddess the demons of Lao-tse carved for him; whose softly curved lips were red as the royal coral, and whose golden-brown hair reached to her knees.

The second was a gigantic frog—a woman frog, head helmeted with carapace of shell around which a fillet of brilliant yellow jewels shone; enormous round eyes of blue circled with a broad iris of green; monstrous body of banded orange and white girdled with strand upon strand of the flashing yellow gems; six feet high if an inch, and with one webbed paw of its short, powerfully muscled forelegs resting upon the white shoulder of the golden-eyed girl.

CHAPTER V

"I'D FOLLOW HER THROUGH HELL!"

MOMENTS must have passed as we stood in stark amazement, gazing at that incredible apparition. The two figures, although as real as any of those who stood beside me, unfantomlike as it is possible to be, had a distinct suggestion of—projection.

They were there before us—golden-eyed girl and grotesque frog-woman—complete in every line and curve. And still it was as though their bodies passed back through distances. As though, to try to express the well-nigh inexpressible, the two shapes we were looking upon were the end of an infinite number stretching in fine linked chain far away, of which the eyes saw only the nearest, while in the brain some faculty higher than sight recognized and registered the unseen others.

It crossed my mind that so we three-dimensional beings might appear to those dwellers in the hypothetical two-dimensional space we use to help us conceive the fourth dimension. And yet there was nothing of any metaphysical fourth dimension about them; they were actualities—real, breathing, complete.

The gigantic eyes of the frog-woman took us all in, unwinkingly. I could see little glints of phosphorescence shine out within the metallic green of the outer iris ring. She stood upright, her great legs bowed, the monstrous slit of a mouth slightly open, revealing a row of white teeth sharp and pointed as lancets; the paw resting on the girl's shoulder, half covering its silken surface, and from its five webbed digits long yellow claws of polished horn glistening against the delicate texture of the flesh.

But if the frog-woman regarded us all, not so did the maiden of the rosy wall. Her eyes were fastened upon Larry, drinking him in with extraordinary intentness. She was tall, far over the average of woman, almost as tall, indeed, as O'Keefe himself; not more than twenty years old, if that, I thought. Abruptly she leaned forward, the golden eyes softened and grew tender; the red lips moved as though she were speaking.

Larry took a quick step, and his face was that of one who after countless births comes at last upon the twin soul lost to him for ages. The frog woman turned her eyes upon the girl; her huge lips moved, and I knew that she was talking! The girl held out a warning hand to O'Keefe, and then raised it, resting each finger upon one of the five flowers of the carved vine close beside her. Once, twice, three times, she pressed upon the flower centers, and I noted that her hand was curiously long and slender, the digits like those wonderful tapering ones the painters we call the primitives gave to their Virgins.

Three times she pressed the flowers, and then looked intently at Larry once more. A slow, sweet smile curved the crimson lips. She stretched both hands out toward him again eagerly; and then I distinctly saw a burning blush rise swiftly over the flowerlike face.

And in that instant, like the clicking out of a cinematograph, the pulsing oval faded and golden-eyed girl and frog-woman were gone!

And thus it was that Lakla, the handmaiden of the Silent Ones, and Larry O'Keefe first looked into each other's hearts!

"Clearly of the *Ranadae,*" said Von Hetzdorp, "a development of the fossil *Labyrinthodonts:* you saw her teeth, *ya?*"

"*Ranadae,* yes," I answered. "But from

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the *Stegocephalia;* of the order *Ecaudata—"*

"Upon what evidence do you base your theory that she was of the *Stego—"*

I think I never heard such complete indignation, as was in O'Keefe's voice as he interrupted the German.

"What do you mean, fossils and *Stego* whatever it is?" he asked. "She was a girl, a wonder girl—a real girl, and Irish, or I'm not an O'Keefe!"

"We were talking about the frog-woman, Larry," I said, conciliatingly.

He strode swiftly over to the wall. We followed.

"It was here she put up her hand," he murmured. He pressed caressingly the carved calyxes, once, twice, a third time even as she had—and silently and softly the wall began to split. On each side a great stone pivoted slowly, and before us a portal stood, opening into a narrow corridor glowing with the same rosy lustre that had gleamed around the flame-tipped shadows.

O'Keefe leaped forward. I caught him by the arm. The far wall of the tunnel that had been revealed was not more than eight feet from where we were, and it ran, apparently, at right angles to the entrance. There was little of it to be seen, therefore, save the space just in front of us, and I will confess that my nerves were slightly shaken.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Wait," I answered. "Don't rush in there. Let us go together and carefully."

"Come, then, quickly," he said, curiously distrait. "I won't wait. I must follow. That's what she meant, you know."

"What she meant?" I echoed stupidly.

"What she meant when she pointed out the way to open the wall, of course," he said impatiently. "Don't you know that was why she pressed those flowers? She meant us—me—to follow her. Follow her? Why, I'd follow her through a thousand hells!"

Huldricksson stepped beside him. He set a great hand upon the Irishman's shoulder.

"Ja!" he rumbled. "That was no *Troldkvindle,* no black witch, that *Jomfru!* She was a white virgin, *ja.* Well I know that this is Trolldom, but she will help me find my Helma! You go, and Olaf Huldricksson's arm you have with you, always; *ja,* ready to hold or to strike. Come!"

His hand fell from Larry's shoulder and gripped the Irishman's own. I reached down and picked up my emergency kit.

"Have your gun ready, Olaf!" said Larry. With Huldricksson at one end, O'Keefe at the other, both of them with automatics in hand, and Von Hetzdorp and I between them, we stepped over the threshold.

AT OUR right, a few feet away, the passage ended abruptly in a square of polished stone, from which came the faint rose radiance of what Von Hetzdorp had called the "etheric lights." The roof of the place was less than two feet over O'Keefe's head. Behind us was the portal leading into the Chamber of the Pool.

We turned to the left to look down the tunnel's length, and each of us stiffened. A yard in front of us lifted a four-foot high, gently curved barricade, stretching from wall to wall. Beyond it was blackness; an utter and appalling blackness that seemed to gather itself from infinite depths and to be thrust back by the low barrier as a dike thrusts back the menacing sea threatening ever to overwhelm it.

The rose-glow in which we stood was cut off by that blackness as though it had substance; it shimmered out to meet it, and was checked as though by a blow. Indeed, so strong was the suggestion of sinister, straining force within the rayless opacity that I shrank back, and Von Hetzdorp with me. Not so O'Keefe. Olaf beside him, he strode to the wall and peered over. He beckoned us.

"Flash your pocket-light down there," he said to me, pointing into the thick darkness below us. The little electric circle quivered down as though afraid, and came to rest upon a surface that resembled nothing so much as clear, black ice. I ran the light across, here and there. The floor of the corridor was of stone, so smooth, so polished, that no man could have walked upon it; it sloped downward at a slowly increasing angle.

"We'd have to have non-skid chains and brakes on our feet to tackle that," mused Larry. Abstractedly he ran his hands over the edge on which he was leaning. Suddenly they hesitated and then gripped tightly.

"That's a queer one!" he exclaimed. His right palm was resting upon a rounded protuberance, on the side of which were three small circular indentations.

He pressed his fingers upon the circles. They gave under the pressure much, I thought, as an automatic punch does. O'Keefe's thrusting fingers sank deep, deeper, within the stone. There was a sharp click; the slabs that had opened to let us

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through swung swiftly together; a curiously rapid vibration thrilled through us, a wind arose and passed over our heads. A wind that grew and grew until it became a whistling shriek, then a roar and then a mighty humming, to which every atom in our bodies pulsed in rhythm painful almost to disintegration.

The rosy wall dwindled in a flash to a point of light, and disappeared.

Wrapped in the clinging, impenetrable blackness we were racing, dropping, hurling at a frightful speed—where?

And ever that awful humming of the rushing wind and the lightning cleaving of the tangible dark—so, it came to me oddly, must the newly released soul race through the sheer blackness of outer space up to that Throne of Justice, where God sits high above all suns!

I felt Von Hetzdorp creep close to me; gripped my nerve and flashed my pocket-light; saw Larry standing, peering, peering ahead, and Huldricksson, one strong arm around his shoulders, bracing him. And then the speed began to slacken.

Millions of miles, it seemed, below the sound of the unearthly hurricane I heard Larry's voice, thin and ghostlike, beneath its clamor.

"Got it!" shrilled the voice. "Got it! Don't worry!"

The wind died down to a roar, passed back into the whistling shriek and diminished to a steady whisper.

"Press all the way in these holes and she goes top-high," Larry shouted. "Diminish pressure—diminish speed. The curve of this—dashboard—here sends the wind shooting up over our heads—like a windshield. What's behind you?"

I flashed the light back. The mechanism on which we were ended in another wall exactly similar to that over which O'Keefe crouched.

"Well, we can't fall out, anyway," he laughed. "Wish I knew where the brakes were! Look out!"

We dropped dizzily down an abrupt, seemingly endless slope; fell—fell as into an abyss—then shot abruptly out of the blackness into a throbbing green radiance. O'Keefe's fingers must have pressed down upon the controls, for we leaped forward almost with the speed of light. I caught a glimpse of luminous immensities, on the verge of which we flew; of depths inconceivable, and flitting through the incredible spaces—gigantic shadows as of the wings of Israfil, which are so wide, say the Arabs, the world can cower under them like a nestling. And then again the dreadful blackness.

"What was that?" This from Larry, with the nearest approach to awe that I had yet heard from him.

"Trolldom!" croaked the voice of Olaf.

"Gott!" This from Von Hetzdorp. "What a space!

"Have you considered, Dr. Goodwin," he went on after a pause, "a curious thing? Probably the moon was hurled out of this same region we now call the Pacific when the earth was yet like molasses; almost molten, I should say. And is it not curious that that which comes from the moon chamber needs the moon rays to bring it forth? And also that the stone depends upon the moon for operating? *Ja!* And last, such a space in mother earth as we just glimpsed, how else could it have been torn but by some gigantic birth, like that of the moon?"

I started; there was so much that this might explain—an unkown element that responded to the moon-rays in opening the moon-door; the blue Pool with its weird radioactivity, and the peculiar mystery within it that reacted to the same light stream— What is there at the heart of earth? What of that radiant unknown element upon the moon mount Tycho? Yes—and what if Tycho's enigma had itself come from earth heart? What miracles were hidden there?

THE car seemed to poise itself for an instant, and then again dipped itself literally down into sheer space; skimmed forward in what was clearly curved flight, rose as upon a sweeping up-grade, and then began swiftly to slacken its fearful speed. I glanced at the illuminated dial of the watch on my wrist. It had been exactly twelve minutes since we had seen the roseate door fade into the blackness. But how far had we gone in those twelve minutes—scores of miles or hundreds of miles?—there was no knowing.

Far ahead a point of light showed; grew steadily; we were within. Then softly all movement ceased.

It was then I noted that the car, for so I must call it, that had brought us to this place was shaped somewhat like one of the Thames punts. Its back must have fitted with the utmost nicety into the end of the passage upon which the inner doors of the Moon Pool Chamber had opened, for certainly when we stepped within it there had been no sign that it was other than part of the wall itself.

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Where was its guiding mechanism? I could only conjecture that as the car moved away from the entrance there were slabs that slipped ingeniously into place, protecting those within from what would have been instant annihilating contact with the tunnel walls when the car ran close to them, or from pitching out when it skirted in the blackness, abysses such as that luminous green space that had sent each of our souls shivering back in awe.

The car rested in a slit in the center of a smooth walled chamber perhaps twenty feet square. The wall facing us was pierced by a low doorway through which we could see a flight of steps leading downward.

I glanced upward. The light streamed through an enormous oval opening, the base of which was twice a tall man's height from the floor. A curving flight of broad, low steps led up to it. And now it came to my steadying brain that there was something puzzling, peculiar, strangely unfamiliar about this light. It was silvery, shaded faintly with a delicate blue and flushed lightly with a nacreous rose; but a rose that differed from that of the terraces of the Pool Chamber as the rose within the opal differs from that within the pearl. In it were tiny, gleaming points like the motes in a sunbeam, but sparkling white like the dust of diamonds, and with a quality of vibrant vitality; they were as though they were alive. The light cast no shadows!

I hurried forward. At first all that I could see was space. A space filled with the same corcuscating effulgence that pulsed about me. I glanced upward, obeying that instinctive impulse of earth folk that bids them seek within the sky for sources of light. There was no sky. All was a sparkling nebulosity rising into infinite distances as the azure above the day-world seems to fill all the heavens. Through it ran pulsing waves and flashing javelin rays that were like shining shadows of the aurora; echoes, octaves lower, of those brilliant arpeggios and chords that play about the poles. My eyes fell beneath its splendor; I started outward.

And now I saw, miles away, gigantic luminous cliffs springing sheer from the limits of a lake whose waters were of milkly opalescence. It was from these cliffs that the spangled radiance came, shimmering out from all their lustrous surfaces. To left and to right, as far as the eye could see, they stretched, and they vanished in the auroral nebulosity on high.

"Look at that!" exclaimed Larry. I followed his pointing finger. On the face of the shining wall, stretched between two colossal columns, hung an incredible veil; prismatic, gleaming with all the colors of the spectrum. It was like a web of rainbows woven by the fingers of the daughters of the Jinni. In front of it and a little at each side was a semicircular pier, or better, a plaza of what appeared to be glistening, pale-yellow ivory. At each end of its half-circle clustred a few low-walled rose-stone structures, each of them surmounted by a number of high, slender pinnacles.

"Of a hugeness, that!" It was Von Hetzdorp. "Have you considered that those precipices must from eight to ten miles away be, Dr. Goodwin? And, if so, how great must that so strange, prismatic curtain that we see so clearly be, eh? What hands could carve those columns between which it hangs? It is in my mind that we will carry back with us many new things, Dr. Goodwin—if we carry back at all," he concluded slowly.

We looked at each other, helplessly, and back again through the opening. We were standing, as I have said, at its base. The wall in which it was set was at least ten feet thick, and so, of course, all that we could see of that which was without were the distances that revealed themselves above the outer ledge of the oval.

"Let's take a look at what's under us," said Larry.

He crept out upon the ledge and peered down, the rest of us following. We stared in utter silence. A hundred yards beneath us stretched gardens that must have been like those of many-columned Iram, which the ancient Addite King had built for his pleasure ages before the deluge. And which Allah, so the Arab legend tells, took and hid from man, within the Sahara, beyond all hope of finding—jealous because they were more beautiful than his in paradise. Within them flowers and groves of laced, fernlike trees, pillard pavilions nestled.

The trunks of the trees were of emerald, of vermilion, and of azure-blue, and the blossoms, whose fragrance was borne to us, shone like jewels. The graceful pillars were tinted delicately. I noted that the pavilions were double—in a way, two-storied — and that they were oddly splotched with circles, with squares, and with oblongs of opacity. I noted, too, that over many this opacity stretched like a roof.

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Yet it did not seem material; rather was it—impenetrable shadow!

Down through this city of gardens ran a broad, shining green thoroughfare, glistening like glass and spanned at regular intervals with graceful, arched bridges. The road flashed to a wide square, where rose, from a base of that same silvery stone that formed the lip of the Moon Pool, a Titanic tower of seven terraces; and along it flitted objects that bore a curious resemblance to the shell of the nautilus. Within them were human figures. And upon tree-bordered promenades on each side walked others.

Far to the right we caught the glint of another emerald paved road.

And between the two the gardens grew sweetly down to the hither side of that opalescent water across which were the radiant cliffs and the curtain of mystery.

Thus it was that we first saw the city of the Dweller; blessed and accursed as no place on earth, or under or above earth has ever been—or, that force willing which some call God, ever again shall be!

CHAPTER VI

PRIESTESS OF THE SHINING ONE

"YOU'D better have this handy, Doc." O'Keefe paused at the head of the stairway and handed me one of the automatics he had taken from Von Hetzdorp.

"Shall I not have one also?" rather anxiously asked the latter.

"When you need it you'll get it," answered O'Keefe. "I'll tell you frankly, though, professor, that you'll have to show me before I trust you with a gun. You shoot too straight—from cover."

The flash of anger in the German's eyes turned to a cold consideration.

"You say always just what is in your mind, Lieutenant O'Keefe," he mused. "*Ja*—that I shall remember." Later I was to recall this odd observation, and Von Hetzdorp was to remember, indeed.

In single file, O'Keefe at the head and Olaf bringing up the rear, we passed through the portal. Before us dropped a circular shaft, into which the light from the chamber of the oval streamed liquidly; set in its sides, the steps spiraled, and down them we went, cautiously. The stairway ended in a circular well; silent, with no trace of exit. The rounded stones joined each other evenly, hermetically. Carved on one of the slabs was one of the fire flowered vines. I pressed my fingers upon the calyxes, even as Larry had within the moon chamber.

A crack—horizontal, four feet wide—appeared on the wall; widened, and as the sinking slab that made it dropped to the level of our eyes, we looked through a hundred-feet-long rift in the living rock! The stone fell steadily, and we saw that it was a Cyclopean wedge set within the slit of the passageway. It reached the level of our feet and stopped. At the far end of this tunnel, whose floor was the polished rock that had, a moment before, fitted hermetically into its roof, was a low, narrow, triangular opening through which light streamed.

"Nowhere to go but out!" grinned Larry. "And I'll bet Golden Eyes is waiting for us with a taxi!" He stepped forward. We followed, slipping, sliding, along the glassy surface. And I, for one, had a lively apprehension of what our fate would be should that enormous mass rise before we had emerged. We reached the end, crept out of the narrow triangle that was its exit.

We stood upon a wide ledge carpeted with a thick yellow moss. I looked behind, and clutched O'Keefe's arm. The door through which we had come had vanished! There was only a precipice of pale rock, on whose surfaces great patches of the amber moss hung; around whose base our ledge ran, and whose summits, if summits it had, were hidden, like the luminous cliffs, in the radiance above us.

"Nowhere to go but ahead, and Golden Eyes hasn't kept her date!" laughed O'Keefe—but somewhat grimly.

We looked down. At the left the green roadway curved, and, at least thirty feet below us, swept on. Far off to the right it swerved again and continued as the glistening distant ribbon we had seen from the high oval. Within its loop, like a peninsula, its foot bathed by the lake, lay the gardened city. What was beyond the road we could not see for, all along its outer side, it was banked with solid masses of high-flung verdure.

We walked a few yards along the ledge and, rounding a corner, faced the end of one of the slender bridges. From this vantage point the oddly shaped vehicles were plain, and we could see they were, indeed, like the shell of the Nautilus and elfinly beautiful. Their drivers sat high upon the forward whorl. Their bodies were piled high with cushions, upon which lay women half-swathed in gay silken webs. From the

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pavilioned gardens smaller channels of glistening green ran into the broad way, much as usual automobile runways do; and in and out of them flashed the fairy shells.

There came a shout from one. Its occupants had glimpsed us. They pointed; others stopped and stared; one shell turned and sped up a runway—and quickly over the other side of the bridge came a score of men. They were dwarfed—none of them more than five feet high, prodigiously broad of shoulder, clearly enormously powerful.

"Trolde!" muttered Olaf, stepping beside O'Keefe, pistol swinging free in his hand.

But at the middle of the bridge the leader stopped, waved back his men, and came toward us alone, palms outstretched in the immemorial, universal gesture of truce. He paused, scanning us with manifest wonder; we returned the scrutiny with interest. The dwarf's face was as white as Olaf's—far whiter than those of the other three of us; the features clean-cut and noble, almost classical; the wide set eyes of a curious greenish gray and the black hair curling over his head like that on some old Greek statue.

Dwarfed though he was, there was no suggestion of deformity about him. The gigantic shoulders were covered with a loose green tunic that looked like fine linen. It was caught in at the waist by a broad girdle studded with what seemed to be amazonites. In it was thrust a long curved poniard resembling the Malaysian kris. His legs were swathed in the same green cloth as the upper garment. His feet were sandaled.

My gaze returned to his face, and in it I found something subtly disturbing; an expression of half-malicious gaiety that underlay the wholly prepossessing features like a vague threat. A mocking deviltry that hinted at entire callousness to suffering or sorrow; something of the spirit that was vaguely alien and disquieting.

HE SPOKE, and to my surprise, enough of the words were familiar to enable me clearly to catch the meaning of the whole. They were Polynesian, the Polynesian of the Samoans which is its most ancient form, but in some indefinable way—archaic. Later I was to know that the tongue bore the same relation to the Polynesian of today as does that of Chaucer to modern English.

Huldricksson spoke Polynesian well, and understood it better than he spoke it; O'Keefe had a working smattering. Later I was to find the German was a master of it.

"From whence do you come, strangers, and how found you your way here?" said the green dwarf.

I waved my hand toward the cliff behind us. His eyes narrowed incredulously; he glanced at its drop, upon which even a mountain goat could not have made its way, and laughed.

"We came through the rock," I answered his thought. "And we come in peace," I added.

"And may peace walk with you," he said half-derisively, "if the Shining One wills it!"

He considered us again.

"Show me, strangers, where you came through the rock," he commanded. We led the way to where we had emerged from the well of the stairway.

"It was here," I said, tapping the cliff.

"But I see no opening," he said suavely.

"It closed behind us," I answered; and then, for the first time, realized how incredible the explanation sounded. The derisive gleam passed through his eyes again. But he drew his poniard and gravely sounded the rock.

"You give a strange turn to our speech," he said. "It sounds strangely, indeed—as strange as your answers." He looked at us quizzically. "I wonder where you learned it! Well, all that you can explain to the *Afyo Mate.*" His head bowed and his arms swept out in a wide salaam. "Be pleased to come with me!" he ended abruptly.

"In peace?" I asked.

"In peace," he replied. Then slowly, "With me, at least."

"Oh, come on, Doc!" cried Larry. "As long as we're here let's see the sights. *Allons, mon vieux!*" he called gaily to the green dwarf. The latter, understanding the spirit, if not the words, looked at O'Keefe with a twinkle of approval.

He stood aside and waved a hand courteously, inviting us to pass. We reached the bridge again; he spoke two words to his men, who immediately lined up on each side of the arch, watching us as we walked between them with same suggestion of expectant, malicious derision that I found so disquieting in their leader. We crossed. At the base of the span one of the elfin shells was waiting.

"Free ride in the subway patrol," whispered O'Keefe, grinning.

Beyond, scores of the shells had gath-

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ered, their occupants evidently discussing us in much excitment. The green dwarf waved us to the piles of cushions and then threw himself beside us. The vehicle started off smoothly, the now silent throng making way, and swept down the green roadway at a terrific pace and wholly without vibration, toward the seven-terraced tower.

We turned abruptly and swept up a runaway through one of the gardens, and stopped softly before a pillared pavilion. I saw now that these were much larger than I had thought. The structure to which we had been carried covered, I estimated, fully an acre. Oblong, with its slender, vari-colored columns spaced regularly, its walls were like the sliding screens of the Japanese. I had little time to note them, nor, to my regret, to satisfy my very eager curiosity as to the character of the trees and the beautiful bowering blossoms.

The green dwarf hurried us up a flight of broad steps flanked by great carved serpents, winged and scaled. He stamped twice upon mosaicked stones between two of the pillars, and a screen rolled aside, revealing an immense hall, scattered about with low divans on which lolled a dozen or more of the dwarfish men, dressed identically as he.

They sauntered up to us leisurely; the surprised interest in their faces tempered by the same inhumanly gay malice that seemed to be characteristic of all these people we had as yet seen.

"The *Afyo Maie* awaits them, Rador," said one.

So the green dwarf's name was Rador.

He nodded, beckoned us, and led the way through the great hall and into a smaller chamber whose far side was covered with the opacity I had noted from the aerie of the cliff. I examined the—blackness—with lively interest.

It had neither substance nor texture; it was not matter—and yet it suggested solidity; an entire cessation, a complete absorption of light; an ebon veil at once immaterial and palpable. I stretched, involuntarily, my hand out toward it, and felt it quickly drawn back.

"Do you seek your end so soon?" whispered Rador. "But I forgot that you do not know," he added. "On your life touch not the blackness, ever. It—"

He stopped, for abruptly in the density a portal appeared; springing out of the shadow like a picture thrown by a lantern upon a screen. Through it was revealed a chamber filled with a soft, rosy glow. Rising from cushioned couches, a woman and a man regarded us, half leaning over a long, low table of what seemed polished jet, laden with flowers and unfamiliar fruits.

About the room—that part of it, at least, that I could see—were a few oddly shaped chairs of the same substance. On high silvery tripods stood three immense globes, and it was from them that the rose glow emanated. At the side of the woman stood a smaller globe whose roseate gleam was tempered by quivering waves of blue.

"Enter Rador with the strangers!" a clear, sweet voice called.

Rador bowed deeply and stood aside, motioning us to pass. We entered, the green dwarf behind us, and out of the corner of my eye I saw the doorway fade as abruptly as it had appeared and again the dense shadow fill its place.

"Come closer, strangers. Be not afraid!" commanded the bell-toned voice.

We approached.

The woman, unimaginative scientist that I am, made the breath catch in my throat. Never had I seen a woman so beautiful as was Yolara of the Dweller city, and none of so perilous a beauty. Her hair was of the color of the young tassels of the corn and coiled in a regal crown above her broad, white brows. Her wide eyes were of gray that could change to a corn-flower blue and in anger deepen to purple. Gray or blue, they had little laughing devils within them, but when the storm of anger darkened them, they were no longer laughing.

The silken web that half covered, half revealed her did not hide the ivory whiteness of her flesh nor the sweet curve of shoulders and breasts. But for all her amazing beauty, she was sinister! There was cruelty about the curving mouth, and in the music of her voice. Not conscious cruelty, but the more terrifying, careless cruelty of nature itself. And she exhaled an essence of vitality that made the nerves tingle toward her and shrink from her, too, as from something abnormal.

The girl of the rose wall had been beautiful, yes! But here beauty was human, understandable. You could imagine her with a babe in her arms, but you could not so imagine this woman! About her loveliness hovered something unearthly. A sweet, feminine echo of the Dweller was Yolara, the Dweller's priestess—and as gloriously, terrifying evil!

AS I LOOKED at her the man arose and made his way round the table toward us. For the first time my eyes took

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in Lugur. A few inches taller than the green dawrf, he was far broader, more filled with the suggestion of strength.

The tremendous shoulders were four feet wide if an inch, tapering down to mighty thewed thighs. The muscles of his chest stood out beneath his tunic of red. Around his forehead shone a chaplet of bright-blue stones, sparkling among the thick curls of his silver-ash hair.

Upon his face pride and ambition were written large, and power still larger. All the mockery, the malice, the hint of callous indifference that I had noted in the other dwarfish men were there, too—but intensified, touched with the satanic.

The woman spoke again.

"Who are you strangers, and how come you here?" She turned to Rador. "Or is it that they do not understand or speak our tongue?"

"One understands and speaks it, but very badly, O Yolara," answered the green dwarf.

"Speak, then, that one of you," she commanded.

But it was Von Hetzdorp who found his voice first, and I marveled at the fluency, so much greater than mine, with which he spoke.

"We came for different purposes. I to seek knowledge of a kind, he"—pointing to me—"of another. This man"—he looked at Olaf—"to find a wife and child."

The gray-blue eyes had been regarding O'Keefe steadily and with plainly increasing interest.

"And why did you come?" she asked him. "Nay, I would have him speak for himself, if he can," she stilled Von Hetzdorp peremptorily.

When Larry spoke it was haltingly, in the tongue that was strange to him, searching for the proper words.

"I came to help these men, and because something I could not then understand called me, O lady whose eyes are like forest pools at dawn," he answered. And even in the unfamiliar words there was a touch of the Irish brogue, and little merry lights danced in the eyes Larry had so apostrophized.

"I could find fault with your speech, but none with its burden," she said. "What forest pools are I know not, and the dawn has not shone upon the people of Lora these many *sais* of *laya*. But I sense what you mean!"

The eyes deepened to blue as she regarded him. I saw Lugur shift impatiently and send a none too pleasant look at O'Keefe. She smiled.

"Are there many like you in the world from which you come?" she asked softly. "Well, we soon shall—"

Lugur interrupted her almost rudely.

"Best we should know how they came hence," he growled.

She darted a quick look at him, and again the little devils danced in her eyes.

"Yes, that is true," she said. "How came you here?"

Again it was Von Hetzdorp who answered—slowly, considering every word.

"In the world above," he said, "there are ruins of cities not built by any of those who now dwell there. To some of us above these places called, and we sought for knowledge of those wise ones passed on. We are seeking, and we found a passageway. The way led us downward to a door in yonder cliff, and through it we came here."

"Then you have found what you sought!" spoke she. "For we are of those who built the cities. But this gateway in the rock—where is it?"

"After we passed, it closed upon us; nor could we after find trace of it," answered Von Hetzdorp.

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The incredulity that had shown upon the face of the green dwarf fell upon theirs; on Lugur's it was clouded with furious anger.

He turned to Rador.

"I could find no opening, lord," thus the green dwarf quickly.

And there was so fierce a fire in the eyes of Lugur as he swung back upon us that O'Keefe's hand slipped stealthily down toward his pistol.

"Best it is to speak truth to Yolara, priestess of the Shining One, and to Lugur, the Voice," he cried menacingly.

"It is the truth," I interposed. "We came down the passage. At its end was a carved vine, a vine of five flowers"—the fire died from the red dwarf's eyes, and I could have sworn to a swift pallor. "I rested a hand upon these flowers, and a door opened. But when we had gone through it and turned, behind us was nothing but unbroken cliff. The door had completely vanished."

I had taken my cue from Von Hetzdorp. If he had eliminated the episode of car and Moon Pool, he had good reason, I had no doubt; and I would be as cautious. And deep within me something cautioned me to say nothing of my quest; to stifle all thought of Throckmartin. Something that warned, peremptorily, finally, as though it were a message from Throckmartin himself!

"A vine with five flowers!" exclaimed the red dwarf. "Was it like this, say?"

He thrust forward a long arm. Upon the thumb of the hand was an immense ring, set with a dull-blue stone. Graven on the face of the jewel was the symbol of the rosy walls of the Moon Chamber that had opened to us their two portals. But cut over the vine were seven circles, one about each of the flowers and two larger ones covering, intersecting them.

"This is the same," I said; "but these were not there"—I indicated the circles.

The woman drew a deep breath and looked deep into Lugur's eyes.

"The sign of the Silent Ones!" he half whispered.

It was the woman who first recovered herself.

"The strangers are weary, Lugur," she said. "When they are rested they shall show us where the rocks opened."

I sensed a subtle change in their attitude toward us; a new intentness; a doubt plainly tinged with apprehension. What was it they feared? I wondered; and why had the symbol of the vine wrought the change? And who or what were the Silent Ones?

YOLARA'S eyes turned to Olaf, hardened, and grew cold gray. Subconsciously I had noticed that from the first the Norseman had been absorbed in his regard of the pair; had indeed never taken his gaze from them; had noticed, too, the priestess dart swift glances toward him.

Upon Olaf's face had been an early look of puzzlement, of uncertainty. Now this had changed to decision; clearly he had made his mind up about something. His gaze was fixed; he returned the woman's scrutiny fearlessly; a touch of contempt in the clear eyes—like a child watching a snake which he did not dread, but whose danger he well knew.

Under that look Yolara stirred impatiently, sensing, I know, its meaning.

"Why do you look at me so?" she cried.

An expression of bewilderment passed over Olaf's face.

"I do not understand," he said in English.

I caught a quickly repressed gleam in O'Keefe's eyes. He knew, as I knew, that Olaf must have understood. But did Von Hetzdorp?

I glanced at him. Apparently he did not. But why was Olaf feigning this ignorance?

"This man is a sailor from what we call the North," thus Larry haltingly. "He is crazed, I think. He tells a strange tale, of a something of white fire that took his wife and babe. We found him wandering where we were. And because he is strong we brought him with us. That is all, O lady whose voice is sweeter than the honey of the wild bees!"

"A shape of white fire?" she repeated eagerly.

"A shape of white fire that whirled beneath the moon, with the sound of little bells," answered Larry, watching her intently.

She looked at Lugur and laughed.

"Then he, too, is fortunate," she said. "For he has come to the place of his something of white fire. And tell him that he shall join his wife and child, in time; that I promise him."

Upon the Norseman's face there was no hint of comprehension, and at that moment I formed an entirely new opinion of Olaf's intelligence. For certainly it must have been a prodigious effort of the will indeed that enabled him, understanding, to control himself.

"What does she say?" he asked.

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Larry repeated.

An expression of gladness spread over his face.

"Good!" said Olaf. "Good!"

He looked at Yolara with well-assumed gratitude. Lugur, who had been scanning his bulk, drew close. He felt the giant muscles which Huldricksson accommodatingly flexed for him.

"But he shall meet Valdor and Tahola before he sees those kin of his," he laughed mockingly. "And if he bests them, he shall meet me. After that—for reward—his wife and babe!"

A shudder, quickly repressed, shook the seaman's frame. The woman bent her supremely beautiful head.

"These two," she said, pointing to the German and me, "seem to be men of learning. They may be useful. As for this man" —she smiled at Larry—"I would have him explain to me some things. She hesitated. "What 'hon-ey of 'e wild bees-s' is?" She laughed sweetly, sinisterly. "And now—take them, Rador, give them food and water and let them rest till we shall call them again."

She stretched out a hand toward O'Keefe. The Irishman bowed low over it, raised it softly to his lips. There was a vicious hiss from Lugur; but Yolara regarded Larry with eyes now all tender blue.

"You please me," she whispered.

And the face of Lugur grew dark with passion.

We turned to go. The rosy, azure-shot globe at her side suddenly dulled. From it came a faint bell sound as of chimes far away. She bent over it. It vibrated, and then its surface ran with little waves of dull color. From it came a whispering so low that I could not distinguish the words, if words they were.

She spoke to the red dwarf.

"They have brought the three who blasphemed the Shining One," she said slowly. "Now it is in my mind to show these strangers the justice of Lora. Perhaps, they may learn wisdom from it. What say you, Lugur?"

The red dwarf nodded, his eyes sparkling now with a malicious anticipation.

The woman spoke again to the globe. "Bring them here!"

And again it ran swiftly with its film of colors, darkened, and shone rosy once more. From without there came the rustle of many feet upon the rugs. Yolara pressed a slender hand upon the base of the pedestal of the globe beside her. Abruptly the light faded from all, and on the same instant the four walls of blackness vanished, revealing on two sides the lovely, unfamiliar garden through the guarding rows of pillars. At our backs soft draperies hid what lay beyond; before us, flanked by flowered screens, was the corridor through which we had entered, crowded now by the green dwarfs of the great hall.

THE dwarfs advanced. Each, I now noted, had the same clustering black hair of Rador. They separated, and from them stepped three figures—a youth of not more than twenty, short, but with great shoulders of all the males we had seen of this race; a girl of seventeen, I judged, white-faced, a head taller than the boy, her long, black hair disheveled, and clad in a simple white sleeveless garment that fell only to the knees. And behind these two a stunted, gnarled shape whose head was sunk deep between the enormous shoulders, whose white beard fell like that of some ancient gnome down to his waist, and whose eyes were a white flame of hate. The girl cast herself weeping at the feet of the priestess.

"You are Songar of the Lower Waters?" murmured Yolara almost caressingly. "And this is your daughter and her lover?"

The gnome nodded, the flame in his eyes leaping higher.

"It has come to me that you three have dared blaspheme the Shining One, its priestess, and its Voice," went on Yolara smoothly. "Also that you have called out to the three Silent Ones. Is it true?"

"Your spies have spoken, and have you not already judged us?" The voice of the old dwarf was bitter.

A flicker shot through the eyes of Yolara, again cold gray. The girl reached a trembling hand up to the hem of her veils. She thrust it aside with her foot cruelly.

"Tell us why you did these things, Songar," she asked. "Why you did them, knowing well what your reward would be?"

The dwarf stiffened; he raised his withered arms, and his eyes blazed.

"Because evil are your thoughts and evil are your deeds," he cried. "Yours and your lover's, there." He leveled a finger at Lugur. "Because of the Shining One you have made evil, too, and the greater wickedness you contemplate—you and he with the Shining One. But I tell you that your measure of iniquity is full; the tale of your sin near ended! Yea, the Silent Ones have been patient, but soon they will speak." He pointed at us. "A sign are they —a warning!"

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In Yolara's eyes, grown black, the devils leaped unrestrained.

"Is it even so, Songar?" her voice caressed. "Now ask the Silent Ones to help you! They sit afar, but surely they will hear you." The sweet voice was mocking. "As for these two, they shall pray to the Shining One for forgiveness, and surely the Shining One will take them to its bosom! As for you, you have lived long enough, Songar! Pray to the Silent Ones, Songar, and pass out into the nothingness —you!"

She dipped down into her bosom and drew forth something that resembled a small cone of tarnished silver. She leveled it, a covering clicked from its base, and out of it darted a slender ray of intense green light.

It struck the old dwarf squarely over the heart, and swift as light itself spread, covering him with a gleaming, pale film. She clenched her hand upon the cone, and the ray disappeared; thrust it back into her breast and leaned forward expectantly; so Lugur and so the other dwarfs. From the girl came a low wail of anguish; the boy dropped upon his knees, covering his face.

For the moment the white beard stood rigid; then the robe that had covered him seemed to melt away, revealing all the knotted, monstrous body. And in that body a vibration began, increasing to incredible rapidity. It wavered before us like a reflection in a still pond stirred by a sudden wind. It grew and grew, to a rhythm whose rapidity was intolerable to watch and that still chained the eyes.

The figure grew indistinct, misty. Tiny sparks in infinite numbers leaped from it —like, I thought, the radiant shower of particles hurled out by radium when seen under the microscope. Mistier still it grew. And then there trembled before us for a moment a faintly luminous shadow which held, here and there, tiny sparkling atoms like those that pulsed in the light about us. The glowing shadow vanished, the sparkling atoms were still for a moment— and then they shot away, joining those dancing others.

Where the gnomelike form had been but a few short seconds before—there was nothing!

O'Keefe drew a long breath, and I was sensible of a prickling along my scalp.

Yolara leaned toward us.

"You have seen," she said. Her eyes lingered tigerishly upon Olaf's pallid face. "Heed!" she whispered. She turned to the men in green, who were laughing softly among themselves.

"Take these two, and go!" she commanded.

"The justice of Lora," said the red dwarf. "The justice of Lora and the Shining One under Thanaroa!"

Upon the utterance of the last word I saw Von Hetzdorp start violently. The hand at his side made a swift, surreptitious gesture, so fleeting that I hardly caught it. The red dwarf stared at the German, and for the first time I saw complete amazement upon his face.

He glanced at Yolara, found her intent in thought, and as swiftly as had been Von Hetzdorp's action, returned it. I thought I saw the latter make an answering sign.

"Yolara," the red dwarf spoke, "it would please me to take this man of wisdom to my own place for a time. The giant I would have, too."

The woman awoke from her brooding; nodded.

"As you will, Lugur," she said. She beckoned Rador.

As he led us out I saw from the corner of my eye Olaf following quietly the German and the red dwarf. And again I wondered.

And as, shaken to the core, we passed out into the garden into the full throbbing of the light, I wondered if all the tiny sparkling diamond points that shook about us had once been men like Songar of the Lower Waters—and felt my very soul grow sick!

CHAPTER VII

THE ANGRY, WHISPERING GLOBE

OUR way led along the winding path between banked masses of feathery ferns whose plumes were starred with fragrant white and blue flowerettes, slender creepers swinging from the branches of the strangely trunked trees bearing along their threads orchidlike blossoms both delicately frail and gorgeously flamboyant. Like the giant mosses which I later saw in the caverned road to the Sea of Crimson, in our flight to the Silent Ones, I could not identify them.

A smaller pavilion arose before us, single-storied, front wide open. Upon its threshold Rador paused, bowed deeply, and motioned us within. The chamber we entered was large, closed on two sides by screens of gray; at the back gay, concealing curtains. The low table of blue stone,

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dressed with fine white cloths, stretched at one side flanked by the cushioned divans.

At the left was a high tripod bearing one of the rosy globes we had seen in the house of Yolara; at the head of the table a smaller globe similar to the whispering one. Rador pressed upon its base, and two other screens slid into place across the entrance, shutting in the room.

He clapped his hands; the curtains parted, and two girls came through them. Tall and willow lithe, their bluish-black hair falling in ringlets just below their white shoulders, their clear eyes of forget-me-not blue, and skins of extraordinary fineness and purity—they were singularly attractive. Each was clad in an extremely scanty bodice of silken blue, girdled above a kirtle that came barely to their very pretty knees.

The maidens returned our stares with interest, and now I noted that the uncanny deviltry written so large upon the faces of the dwarfs, limned so delicately upon that of Yolara, was here but a shadow. Present it certainly was, but tinctured, underlaid, with a settled wistfulness almost melancholy.

They gave me, I must admit, only a slight share of their attention; Larry the most of it. I lack nearly a foot of his height, my eyes are spectacled.

Their wistfulness fled; they laughed with little gleams of milky teeth—the laughter of careless youth—and Larry laughed with them. The green dwarf regarded all with his malice-tipped smile.

"Food and drink," he ordered.

They dropped back through the curtains.

"Do you like them?" he asked us.

"Some cuties!" said Larry. "They delight the heart," he translated for Rador.

The green dwarf's next remark made me gasp. "They are yours," he said.

The pair re-entered, bearing a great platter on which were small loaves, strange fruits, and three immense flagons of rock crystal—two filled with a slightly sparkling yellow liquid and the third with a purplish drink. I became acutely sensible that it had been hours since I had either eaten or drunk. The yellow flagons were set before Larry and me, the purple at Rador's hand.

The girls, at his signal, again withdrew. I raised my glass to my lips and took a deep draft. The taste was unfamiliar but delightful.

Almost at once my fatigue disappeared. I realized a clarity of mind, an interesting exhilaration and sense of irresponsibility, of freedom from care, that were oddly enjoyable. Larry became immediately his old gay self.

Still there did not seem to be any of the characteristics of alcohol in the drink. The bread was excellent, tasting like fine wheat. The fruits were as unfamiliar as the wine, and seemed to have the quality of making one forget any desire for either flesh or vegetables. The green dwarf regarded us whimsically sipping from his great flagon of rock crystal.

"Much do I desire to know of that world you came from," he said at last—"through the rocks," he added mischievously.

"And much do we desire to know of this world of yours, O Rador," I answered.

Should I ask him of the Dweller; seek from him a clue to Throckmartin? Again, clearly as a spoken command, came the warning to forbear, to wait. And once more I obeyed.

"LET us learn, then, from each other." The dwarf was laughing. "And first, are they all like you—drawn out?" He made an expressive gesture. "And are there many of you?"

"There are—" I hesitated, and at last spoke the Polynesian that means tens upon tens multiplied indefinitely—"there are as many as the drops of water in the lake we saw from the ledge where you found us," I continued; "many as the leaves on the trees without. And they are all like us, but varyingly."

He considered skeptically, I could see, my remark upon our numbers.

"In Muria," he said at last, "the men are like me or like Lugur. Our women are as you see them. Like Yolara or like those black-haired two who served you." He hesitated. "And there is a third; but only one."

Larry leaned forward eagerly.

"Brown-haired with glints of ruddy bronze, golden eyed, and lovely as a dream, with slender, beautiful hands?" he cried.

"Where saw you her?" interrupted the dwarf, starting to his feet.

"Saw her?" Larry recovered himself. "Nay, Rador, perhaps I only dreamed that there was such a woman."

"See to it, then, that you tell not your dream to Yolara," said the dwarf grimly. "For her I meant and her you have pictured is Lakla, the handmaiden to the Silent Ones, and neither Yolara or Lugur, nay, nor the Shining One, love her overmuch, stranger."

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"Does she dwell here?" Larry's face was alight.

The dwarf hesitated, glanced about him anxiously.

"If she does, Doc, we're going to beat it her way quick." Larry shot the words to me quickly.

"Nay," Rador was answering. "Ask me no more of her."

He was silent for a space.

"How great is this world of yours, Rador?" I spoke.

He considered me gravely.

"How great indeed I do not know," he said frankly at last. "The land where we dwell with the Shining One stretches along the white waters for—" He used a phrase of which I could make nothing. "Beyond this city of the Shining One and on the hither shores of the white waters dwell the *mayia ladala,* the common ones." He took a deep draft from his flagon. "There are, first, the fair-haired ones, the children of the ancient rulers," he continued. "There are, second, we the soldiers; and last the *mayia ladala,* who dig and till and weave and toil and give our rulers and us their daughters, and dance with the Shining One!" he added.

"Who rules?" I asked.

"The fair haired, under the Council of Nine, who are under Yolara, the Priestess and Lugur, the Voice," he answered, "who are in turn beneath the Shining One!" There was a ring of bitter satire in the last.

"And those three who were judged?"—this from Larry.

"They were of the *mayia ladala,*" he replied, "like those two I gave you. But they grow restless. They do not like to dance with the Shining One, the blasphemers!" He raised his voice in a sudden great shout of mocking laughter.

In his words I caught a fleeting picture of the race. An ancient, luxurious, closebred oligarchy clustered about some mysterious deity; a soldier class that supported them; and underneath all the toiling, oppressed hordes.

"And is that all?" asked Larry.

"No," he answered. "Beyond the Lower Waters, over the Black Precipices of Doul are the forests where lie the feathered serpents and the secrets they guard. The Black Precipices of Doul are hard to pass, but none can pass through the feathered serpents. And there is the Sea of Crimson where—" he stopped abruptly, drank and set down his flagon empty. Whatever the purple drink might be, it was loosening the green dwarf's tongue and neither of us cared to interrupt him.

"It is strange, strange indeed to be sitting with two who have newly come from that land that we were forced from so many *sats* of *laya* agone," he began again, half musingly, gone upon another tangent. "For we too came from your world, but how long, long ago! I have heard that the waters swept over us slowly, but dragging, ever dragging our land beneath them. And we sought refuge in the secret heart of our land, refusing to leave her. And at the last we made our way here, where was the Shining One and where had been others before us who had left behind them greater knowledge than we brought—and that was no little, strangers. And now the *laya* turn upon themselves. The tail of the serpent coils close to his fangs." He took a great drink of the yellow liquid; his eyes flashed.

And without warning the globe beside us sent out an almost vicious note. Rador turned toward it, his face paling. Its surface crawled with whisperings—angry, peremptory!

"I hear!" he croaked, gripping the table. "I obey!"

He turned to us a face devoid for once of its malice.

"I spoke too quickly," he whispered. "Whether it is because the *Afyo Maie* fears their tongues—or—" he laughed at Larry. "The maids are not yours!" Still laughing he vanished through the curtains of the room of the fountain before I could ask him the meaning of his curious gift, its withdrawal and his most enigmatic closing remarks.

"SOME stuff, that green ray of Yolara's," said O'Keefe, deepest admiration in his voice. "Can you imagine what it would be like in a war—seeing the enemy all at once beginning to shake themselves to pieces? Wow!"

All at once I was aware of an intense drowsiness. O'Keefe, yawning, reached down to unfasten his puttees.

"Lord, I'm sleepy!" he exclaimed. "What made Reddy take such a shine to the von?" he asked drowsily.

"Thanaroa," I answered, fighting to keep my eyes open. "When Lugur spoke that name I saw Von Hetzdorp signal him. Thanaroa is, I suspect, the original form of the name of Tangaroa, the greatest god of the Polynesians. There's a secret cult to him in the islands. Von Hetzdorp may belong to it. He knows it anyway. Lugur

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recognized the signal and despite his surprise answered it."

"Lakla!" I heard O'Keefe's murmur "Lakla of the golden eyes—no, Eilidh—the fair!

"Good luck, old boy, wherever you're going." His hand waved feebly. "Glad—knew—you. Hope—that I see—you—'gain—"

His voice trailed into silence. Fighting, fighting with every fiber of brain and nerve against the sleep, I felt myself being steadily overcome. But before oblivion rushed down upon me I seemed to see upon the gray screened wall nearest the Irishman an oval of rosy light begin to glow, watched, as my falling lids inexorably fell, a flame-tipped shadow waver on it; thicken, condense. And there looking down upon Larry, her eyes great golden stars in which intensest curiosity and shy tenderness struggled, sweet mouth half smiling, was the girl of the Moon Pool's Chamber, the girl whom the green dwarf had named—Lakla. The vision Larry had invoked before the sleep which I could no longer deny had claimed him.

And did I see about and behind her a cloud of other eyes—not those phosphorescent saucers of the frog woman's enormous eyes—triangular—pools of shining jet flecked with little rushing, flickering ruby flames?

Closer she came—closer—the eyes were over us.

Then oblivion indeed!

When I awakened, it was with all the familiar homely sensation of a shade having been pulled up suddenly in a darkened room.

"The *Afyo Maie* has summoned us, Doc," Larry said. "We're to—well, I suppose you'd call it breakfast with her. After that, Rador tells me, we're to have a session with the Council of Nine. I suppose Yolara is as curious as any lady of—the upper world, as you might put it—and just naturally can't wait," he added.

We went out past the pillared entrance. In the great hall were the same green dwarfs, this time introduced to us by a variety of names.

Each of them saluted us, throwing the right hand high above the head. We went through a long, bowered corridor and stopped before a door that seemed to be sliced from a monolith of pale jade—high, narrow, set in a wall of opal.

Rador stamped twice and with those supernally sweet, silver bell tones, the door swung open.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LOVELY HAND OF LURKING HATE

THE chamber was small, the opal walls screening it on three sides, the black opacity covering it, the fourth side opening out into a delicious little walled garden, a mass of the fragrant, luminous blooms and delicately colored fruit. Facing it was a small table of reddish wood and from the omnipresent cushions heaped around it arose to greet us—Yolara.

Larry drew in his breath with an involuntary gasp of admiration and bowed low. My own admiration was as frank, and the priestess was well pleased with our homage.

She was swathed in the filmy, half-revelant webs, now of palest blue. The corn-silk hair was caught within a wide-meshed golden net in which sparkled tiny brilliants, like blended sapphires and diamonds. Her own azure eyes sparkled as brightly as they, and I noted again in their clear depths the half-eager approval as they rested upon O'Keefe's lithe, well-knit figure and his keen, clean-cut face. The high-arched, slender feet rested upon soft sandals whose gauzy withes laced the exquisitely formed leg to just below the dimpled knee.

"Some knockout!" exclaimed Larry, looking at me and placing a hand over his heart. "Put her on a New York roof and she'd empty Broadway. Dramatic sense too well developed, though, for comfort. Soft pedal on that stuff. I don't want any more of those Songar matinées. Take the cue from me, Doc."

He turned to Yolara.

"I said, O lady whose shining hair is a web for hearts, that in our world your beauty would dazzle the sight of men as would a little woman sun!" he said, in the florid imagery to which the tongue lends itself so well.

A tiny flush stole up through the translucent skin. The blue eyes softened and she waved us toward the cushions. Black-haired maids stole in, placing before us the fruits, the little loaves and a steaming drink somewhat the color and odor of chocolate. I was conscious of outraged hunger.

"What are you named, strangers?" she asked.

"This man is named Goodwin," said O'Keefe. "As for me, call me Larry.

"Nothing like getting acquainted quick,"

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he said to me—but kept his eyes upon Yolara as though he were voicing another honeyed phrase. And so she took it, for: "You must teach me your tongue," she said.

"Then shall I have two words where now I have one to tell you of your loveliness," he answered her.

"And also that'll take time," he spoke to me. "Essential occupation out of which we can't be drafted to make these fun loving folk any Roman holiday. Get me?"

"Larree," mused Yolara. "I like the sound. It is sweet—" And indeed it was as she spoke it.

"And what is your land named, Larree?" she continued. "And Goodwin's?" She caught the sound perfectly.

"My land, O lady of loveliness, is two—Ireland and America; his but one—America."

She repeated the two names slowly, over and over. We seized the opportunity to attack the food; halting half guiltily as she spoke again.

"Oh, but you are hungry!" she cried. "Eat then." She leaned her chin upon her hands and regarded us, whole fountains of questions brimming up in her eyes.

"How is it, Larree, that you have two countries and Goodwin but one?" she asked, at last unable to keep silent longer.

"I was born in Ireland; he in America. But I have dwelt long in his land and my heart loves each," he said.

She nodded, understandingly.

"Are all the men of Ireland like you, Larree? As all the men here are like Lugur or Rador? I like to look at you," she went on with naïve frankness. "I am tired of men like Lugur and Rador. But they are strong," she added, swiftly. "Lugur can hold up twenty in his two arms and raise six with but one hand."

We could not understand her numerals and she raised white fingers to illustrate.

"That is little, O lady, to the men of Ireland," replied O'Keefe. "Lo, I have seen one of my race hold up ten times twenty of our—what you call that swift thing in which Rador brought us here?"

"*Corial*," she said.

"Hold up ten times twenty of our *corials* with but two fingers, and these *corials* of ours—"

"*Coria*," said she.

"And these *coria* of ours are each greater in weight than ten of yours. Yea, and I have seen another with but one blow of his hand raise hell!

"And so I have," he murmured to me. "And both at Forty-Second and Fifth Avenue, N. Y.—U. S. A."

Yolara considered all this with manifest doubt.

"Hell?" she inquired at last. "I know not the word."

"Well," answered O'Keefe. "Say Muria then. In many ways they are, I gather, O heart's delight, one and the same."

Now the doubt in the blue eyes was strong indeed. She shook her head.

"None of our men can do that!" she answered, at length. "Nor do I think you could, Larree."

"Oh, no," said Larry easily. "I never tried to be that strong. I fly," he added, casually.

The priestess rose to her feet, gazing at him with startled eyes.

"Fly!" she repeated incredulously. "Like a *zitia*? A bird?"

Larry nodded, and then seeing the dawning command in her eyes, went on hastily.

"Not with my own wings, Yolara. In a—a *corial* that moves through—what's the word for air, Doc?—well, through this—" He made a wide gesture up toward the nebulous haze above us. He took a pencil and on a white cloth made a hasty sketch of an airplane. "In a *corial* like this." She regarded the sketch gravely, thrust a hand down into her girdle and brought forth a keen-bladed poniard; cut Larry's markings out and placed the fragments carefully aside.

"That I can understand," she said.

"Remarkably intelligent young woman," muttered O'Keefe. "Hope I'm not giving anything away, but she had me."

"DO YOU have a god in Ireland and America?" she asked. Larry nodded. "What is he called?" she continued.

"He is called the Prince of Peace," answered Larry, and his tone was reverent.

"Does your god dwell with you, like—" She hesitated. "Or afar, like Thanaroa?"

"He dwells in the heart of each of His followers, Yolara," answered the Irishman gravely.

"Yes, so does Thanaroa, but—" She hesitated again.

"But what are your women like, Larree? Are they like me? And how many have loved you?"

"In all Ireland and America there is none like you, Yolara," he answered. "And take that any way you please," he whispered in English. She took it, it was evident, as it most pleased her.

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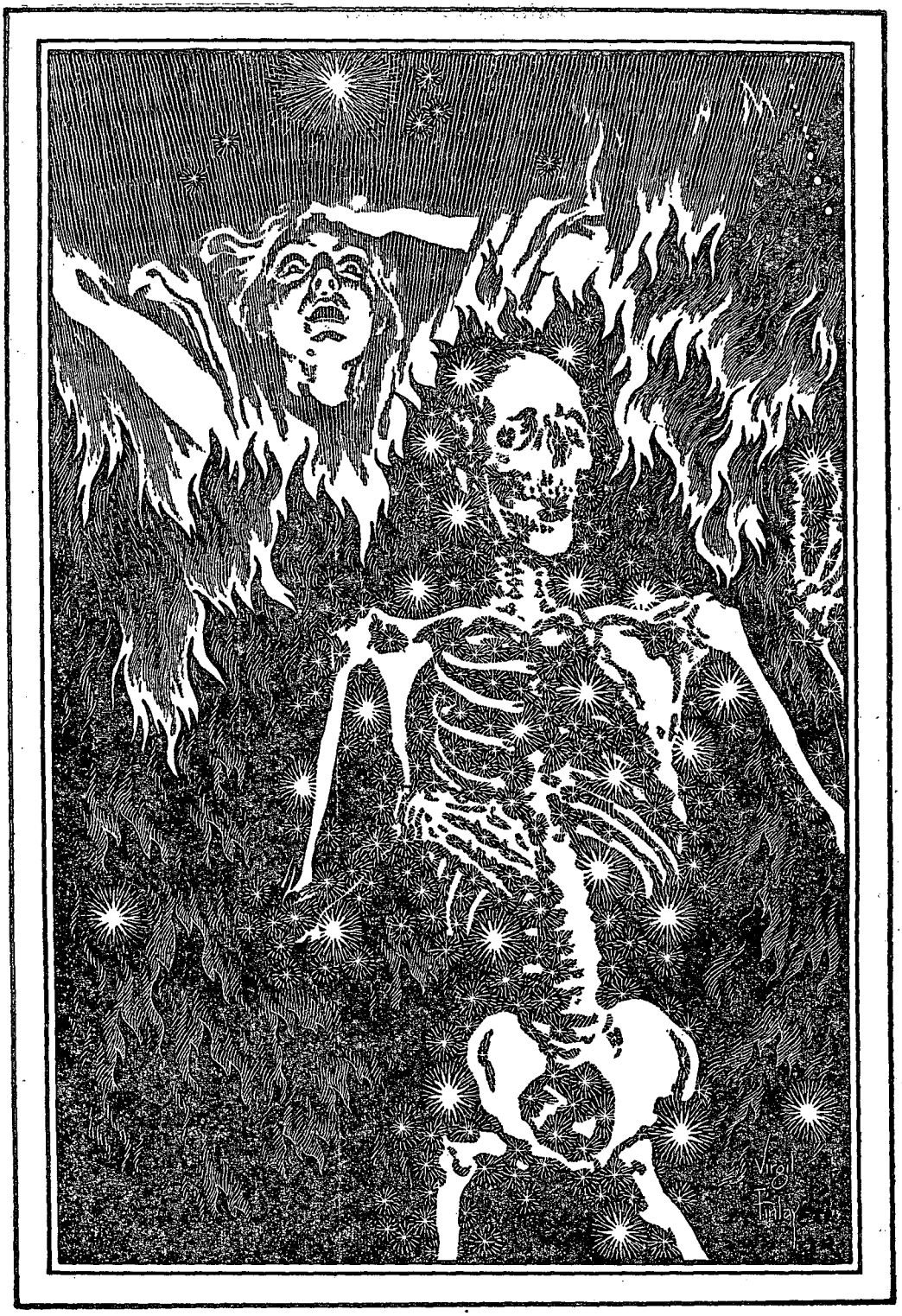

There trembled before us for a moment a faintly luminous shadow which held, here and there, tiny sparkling atoms!

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"Do you have goddesses?" she asked.

"Every woman in Ireland and America, is a goddess," he answered.

"Now that I do not believe." There was both anger and mockery in her eyes. "I know women, Larree, and if that were so there would be no peace for men."

"There isn't!" said O'Keefe. The anger died out and she laughed, sweetly, understandingly.

"And which goddess do you worship?"

"You!" said Larry O'Keefe, boldly.

"Larry! Larry!" I whispered. "Be careful. It's high explosive!"

But the priestess was laughing. Little trills of sweet bell notes; and pleasure was in each note.

"You are indeed bold, Larree," she said, "to offer me your worship. Yet am I pleased by your boldness. Still, Lugur is strong; and you are not of those who—what did you say?—have tried. And your wings are not here, Larree!"

Again her laughter rang out. The Irishman flushed; it was *touché* for Yolara!

"Fear not for me with Lugur," he said, grimly. "Rather fear for him!"

The laughter died; she looked at him searchingly; approval again in her eyes; a little enigmatic smile about her mouth—so sweet and so cruel.

"Well, we shall see," she murmured. "You say you battle in your world. With what?"

"Oh, with this and that," answered Larry, airily. "We manage."

"Have you the *Keth*—I mean that with which I sent Songar into the nothingness?" she asked swiftly.

"See what she's driving at?" O'Keefe spoke to me, swiftly. "Well, I do! Gray matter in that lady's head. But here's where the O'Keefe lands.

"I said," he turned to her, "O voice of silver fire, that your spirit is high even as your beauty, and searches out men's souls as does your loveliness their hearts. And now listen, Yolara, for what I speak is truth"—into his eyes came the far-away gaze; into his voice the Irish softness. "Lo, in my land of Ireland, this many of your life's length agone—see"—he raised his ten fingers, clenched and unclenched them twenty times—"the mighty men of my race, the Taitha-da-Dainn, could send men out into the nothingness even as do you with the *Keth*. And this they did by their harpings, and by words spoken—words of power, O Yolara, that have their power still—and by pipings and by slaying sounds."

His eyes were bright, dream filled; she shrank a little from him, faint pallor on the perfect skin.

"And they could make as well as destroy, those men of Ireland," he said. "I say to you, Yolara, that these things were and are—in Ireland." His voice rang strong. "And I have seen men as many as those that are in your great chamber this many times over, blasted into nothingness before your *Keth* could even have touched them. Yea—and rocks as mighty as those through which we came lifted up and shattered before the lids could fall over your blue eyes. And this is truth, Yolara—all truth! Stay—have you that little cone of the *Keth* with which you destroyed Songar?"

She nodded, gazing at him, fascinated, fear and puzzlement contending.

"Then use it." He took a vase of crystal from the table, placed it on the threshold that led into the garden. "Use it on this, and I will show you."

"I will use it upon one of the *ladala*—" she began eagerly.

The exaltation dropped from him; there was a touch of horror in the eyes he turned to her; her own dropped before it.

"It shall be as you say," she said hurriedly. She drew the shining cone from her breast, leveled it at the vase. The green ray leaped forth, spread over the crystal, but before its action could even be begun, a flash of light shot from O'Keefe's hand, his automatic spat and the trembling vase flew into fragments. As quickly as he had drawn it, he thrust the pistol back into place and stood there empty-handed, looking at her sternly. From the anteroom came shouting, a rush of feet.

YOLARA'S face was white, her eyes strained. But her voice was unshaken as she called to the clamoring guards:

"It is nothing. Go to your places!"

But when the sound of their return had ceased she stared tensely at the Irishman. Then she looked again at the shattered vase.

"It is true!" she cried, "but see, the *Keth* is alive!"

I followed her pointing finger. Each broken bit of the crystal was vibrating, shaking its particles out into space. Broken it the bullet of Larry's had—but not released it from the grip of the disintegrating force. The priestess's face was triumphant.

"But what matters it, O shining urn of beauty—what matters it to the vase that

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is broken what happens to its fragments?" asked Larry, gravely—and pointedly.

The triumph died from her face and for a space she was silent; brooding.

"Next," whispered O'Keefe to me. "Lots of surprises in the little box; keep your eye on the opening and see what comes out."

He had not long to wait. There was a sparkle of anger about Yolara, something, too, of injured pride. She clapped her hands; whispered to the maid who answered her summons, and then sat back regarding us, maliciously.

"You have answered me as to your strength, but you have not proved it; answered me as to your god, and left me doubtful indeed; but the *Keth* you have answered. Now answer this!" she said.

She pointed out into the garden. I saw a flowering branch suddenly bend and snap as though a hand had broken it, but no hand was there! Saw then another and another bend and break, a little tree sway and fall. And closer and closer to us came the trail of snapping boughs while down into the garden poured the silvery light revealing—nothing! Now a great ewer beside a pillar rose swiftly in air and hurled itself crashing at my feet. Cushions close to us swirled about as though in the vortex of a whirlwind.

An unseen hand held my arms in a mighty clutch fast to my sides. Another gripped my throat and I felt a needle-sharp poniard pierce my shirt, touch the skin just over my heart.

"Larry!" I cried, despairingly. I twisted my head; saw that he, too, was caught in this grip of the invisible. But his face was calm, even amused.

"Keep cool, Doc!" he said. "Remember, she wants to learn the language!"

Now from Yolara burst chime upon chime of mocking laughter. She gave a command. The hands loosened, the poniard withdrew from my heart; suddenly as I had been caught I was free. And unpleasantly weak and shaky.

"Have you that in Ireland, Larree?" cried the priestess, and once more trembled with laughter.

"A good play, Yolara." His voice was as calm as his face. "But there's a tree in Ireland, Yolara, with little red berries and it's called the rowan tree. And if you take the berries and squeeze them on your eyes and hands when the moon is just so, there's nobody can see you, at all. It's old in Ireland, Yolara! And in Goodwin's land they make ships—*coria* that go on water—so you can pass by them and see only sea and sky; and those water *coria* are each of them many times greater than this whole palace of yours."

But the priestess laughed on.

"It did get me a little," whispered Larry. "That wasn't quite up to my mark. But if we could find it out and take it back to be used for war!"

"Not so, Larree!" Yolara gasped, through her laughter. "Not so! Goodwin's cry betrayed you!"

Her good humor had entirely returned; she was like a mischievous child pleased over some successful trick; and like a child she cried—"I'll show you!"—signaled again; whispered to the maid who, quickly returning, laid before her a long metal case. Yolara took from her girdle something that looked like a small pencil, pressed it and shot a thin stream of light for all the world like an electric flash, upon its hasp. The lid flew open. Out of it she drew three flat, oval crystals, faint rose in hue. She handed one to O'Keefe and one to me.

"Look!" she commanded, placing the third before her own eyes. I peered through the stone and instantly there leaped into sight, out of thin air, six grinning dwarfs! Each was covered from top of head to soles of feet in a web so tenuous that through it their bodies were plain. The gauzy stuff seemed to vibrate, its strands to run together like quick silver. I snatched the crystal from my eyes, and the chamber was empty! Put it back—and there were the grinning six!

Yolara gave another sign and they disappeared, even from the crystals.

"It is what they wear, Larree," explained Yolara, graciously. "It is something that came to us from the ancient ones. But we have so few." She sighed. "And the secret of their making is well-nigh lost. It is difficult to make"—she hesitated—"but almost are we upon the verge of refinding its ease."

"Such treasures must be two-edged swords, Yolara," commented O'Keefe. "For how know you that one within them creeps not to you with hand eager to strike?"

"There is no danger," she said indifferently. "I am the keeper of them, and I know always where they are. Besides, they cannot pass through the blackness. When one wears them and tries to pass, the darkness sucks the light out of him as thirsty ground does water! And at last he is naught but one of those shadows of which you speak, Larree—although the

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robe itself is not harmed. I will have one of the *ladala* don one and show you," she added, brightly.

"No! No!" cried O'Keefe. She regarded him, amused.

"And now no more," abruptly. "You two are to appear before the council at a certain time, but fear nothing. You, Goodwin, go with Rador about our city and increase your wisdom. But you, Larree, await me here in my garden." She smiled at him, provocatively. Maliciously, too. "For shall not one who has resisted a world of goddesses be given all chance to worship when at last he finds his own?"

She laughed whole-heartedly and was gone. And at that moment I liked Yolara better than ever I had before and—alas—better than ever I was to in the future.

AS LARRY and I reached Rador, who was standing outside, I looked at my watch, which I had taken the precaution to wind before preparing for sleep. It had then been eleven o'clock of the morning in our world outside. Now the watch registered four, but whether we had slept five hours or seventeen or twenty-nine I had no means of knowing. Rador scanned the dial with much interest; drew from his girdle a small disk, and compared the two.

His had thirteen divisions and, beneath the circle marking them, another circle divided into smaller spaces. About each circle a small growing point moved. What he held was, in principle, a watch the same as mine. But I could not know upon what system their time recording was based.

Later I was to find that reckoning rested upon the extraordinary increased luminosity of the cliffs at the time of full moon on earth. This action, to my mind, being linked either with the effect of the light-streaming globes upon the Moon Pool, whose source was in the shining cliffs, or else upon some mysterious affinity of their radiant element with the flood of moonlight on earth. The latter, most probably, because even when the moon must have been clouded above, it made no difference in the phenomenon.

Thirteen of these shining forth constituted a *laya*, one of them a *lat*. Ten was *sa*; ten times ten times ten a *said*, or thousand; ten times a thousand was a *sais*. A *sais* of *laya* was then literally ten thousand years. What we would call an hour was by them called a *va*. The whole time system was, of course, a mingling of time as it had been known to their remote, surface-dwelling ancestors, and the peculiar determining factors in the vast cavern.

An hour of our time is the equivalent of an hour and five-eighths in Muria. For further information upon this matter of relativity the reader may consult any of the numerous books upon the subject.

"Two *va* we have before the council sits," Rador said, thrusting the disk back in his girdle. "As a man of learning you are to be shown whatever of ours may interest you. While the *Afyo Maie* sits with that of yours which certainly interests her," he said, maliciously. "But this I warn you—how are you named, stranger?"

"Goodwin," I answered.

"Goodwin!" he repeated as excellently as had Yolara. "This I must warn you, Goodwin, that I will answer you all I may, but some things I must not. You shall know by my silence what these are."

On fire with eagerness I hurried on. A shell was awaiting us. I paused before entering it to examine the polished surface of runways and great road. It was obsidian—volcanic glass of pale emerald, unflawed, translucent with no sign of block or juncture. It was, indeed, as though it had been poured molten, and then gone over as carefully as a jeweler would a gem. I examined the shell.

"What makes it go?" I asked Rador. At a word from him the driver touched a concealed spring and an aperture appeared beneath the control-lever. Within was a small cube of black crystal, through whose sides I saw, dimly, a rapidly revolving, glowing ball, not more than two inches in diameter. Beneath the cube was a curiously shaped, slender cylinder winding down into the lower body of the nautilus whorl.

"Watch!" said Rador. He motioned me into the vehicle and took a place beside me. The driver touched the lever; a stream of coruscations flew from the ball into the cylinder. The shell started smoothly, and as the tiny torrent of shining particles increased it gathered speed.

"The *corial* does not touch the road," explained Rador. It is lifted so far"—he held his forefinger and thumb less than a sixteenth of an inch apart—"above it."

And perhaps here is the best place to explain the activation of the shells or *coria*. The force utilized was atomic energy. Passing from the whirling ball the ions darted through the cylinder to two bands of a peculiar metal affixed to the base of the vehicles somewhat like skids of a sled. Impinging upon these they pro-

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duced a partial negation of gravity, lifting the shell slightly, and at the same time creating a powerful repulsive force or thrust that could be directed backward, forward, or sidewise at the will of the driver. Something of the same kind of force accounted for the "hearing-talking" globes they used to communicate with each other.

THE wide, glistening road was gay with the *coria*. They darted in and out of the gardens; within them the fair haired, extraordinarily beautiful women on their cushions were like princesses of Elfland, caught in gorgeous fairy webs, resting within the hearts of flowers. In some shells were flaxen-haired, dwarfish men of Lugur's type. Sometimes black-polled brother officers of Rador. Often raven-tressed girls, plainly handmaidens of the women. And now and then beauties of the lower folk went by with one of the blond dwarfs—and then it was plain indeed what their relations were.

Among those who walked along the paralleling promenade were none of the fair-haired. And the haunting wistfulness that underlay the thin film of gaiety on the faces and in the eyes of the black-haired folk, and its contrast with the sinisterly sweet malice, the sheer, unhuman exuberance of life written upon the fair-haired, made something deep, deep, within me tremble with indefinite repulsion.

We swept around the turn that made of the jewel-like roadway an enormous horseshoe and, speedily, upon our right the cliffs through which we had come in our journey from the Moon Pool began to march forward beneath their mantels of moss. They formed a gigantic abutment, a titanic salient. It had been from the very front of this salient's invading angle that we had emerged. On each side of it the precipices, faintly glowing, drew back and vanished into distance.

At the bridge-span we had first crossed, Rador stopped the *corial*, beckoning me to accompany him. We climbed the arch and stood once more upon the mossy ledge. Half a score of the dwarfs were cutting into the cliff face, using tools much resembling our own pneumatic drills, except that they had no connection with any energizing machinery. The drills bit in smoothly but slowly. I imagined that their power was supplied by the same force that ran the *coria*, and asked Rador. He nodded.

"They search for your disappearing portal," he grinned, mischievously. I thought of the depth of that monstrous slice of solid stone that had dropped before us and over whose top we had passed through the hundred-foot tunnel and I felt fairly certain that they would not soon penetrate to the well of the stairway that it concealed and to which the Golden Girl had led us. And I was equally sure the art that had covered this entrance so amazingly had provided at the same time a screen for the oval, high above, through which our eyes had first beheld the city of the Shining One.

Somewhat grimly I asked Rador why they did not use the green ray to disintegrate the rock, as it had the body of Songar. He answered that they did use it, but sparingly.

There were two reasons for this, he went on to explain; first that, in varying degrees, all the rock walls resisted it; the shining cliffs on the opposite side of the White Waters completely. And, second, that when it was used it was at the risk of very dangerous rock falls. There were, it appeared, lines of non-resistance in the cliffs—faults, I suppose—which, under the *Keth*, disintegrated instantaneously. These lines of non-resist-

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ance could not be mapped out beforehand and were likely to bring enormous masses of the resistant portion tumbling down, exactly, I gathered, as a structure of cemented stone would tumble if the cement should abruptly crumble into dust.

They seldom used the ray, therefore, for tunneling or blasting rock in situ. The resistant qualities of the barriers were probably due to the presence of radioactive elements that neutralized the vibratory ray whose essence was, of course, itself radioactive.

The slender, graceful bridges under which we skimmed ended at openings in the upflung, far walls of verdure. Each had its little garrison of soldiers. Through some of the openings a rivulet of the green obsidan river passed. These were roadways to the farther country, to the land of the *ladala,* Rador told me; adding that none of the lesser folk could cross into the pavilioned city unless summoned or without pass.

We turned the bend of the road and flew down the further emerald ribbon we had seen from the great oval. Before us rose the shining cliffs and the lake. A half-mile, perhaps, from these the last of the bridges flung itself. It was more massive and about it hovered a spirit of ancientness lacking in the other spans; also its garrison was larger and at its base the tangent way was guarded by two massive structures, somewhat like block-houses, between which it ran. Something about it aroused in me an intense curiosity.

"Where does that road lead, Rador?" I asked.

"To the one place above all of which I may not tell you, Goodwin," he answered, And again I wondered, and into my wonder burst a thought. Did the road lead to Throckmaratin and those others the Dweller had made its prey? How could I find out?

We skimmed slowly out upon the great pier. Far to the left was the prismatic, rainbow curtain between the Cyclopean pillars. On the white waters swam graceful shells, luculent replicas of the elf chariots, but none was near that distant web of wonder.

"Rador, what is that?" I asked.

"It is the veil of the Shining One!" he answered slowly.

Was the Shining One that which we named the Dweller?

"What is the Shining One?" I cried, eagerly. Again he was silent. Nor did he speak until we had turned on our homeward way.

And lively as was my interest, my scientific curiosity, I was conscious suddenly of acute depression. Beautiful, wondrously beautiful, this place was, and yet in its wonder dwelt a keen edge of menace, of unease, of inexplicable, inhuman woe. As though in a secret garden of God a soul should sense upon it the gaze of some lurking spirit of evil which some way, somehow, had crept into the sanctuary and only bided its time to spring.

The shell carried us straight back to the house of Yolara. We stood again before the tenebrous wall where first we had faced the priestess and the Voice. And as we stood, again the portal appeared with all its disconcerting, magical abruptness; Rador drew aside; I entered; once more the entrance faded.

But now the scene was changed. Around the jet table were grouped a number of figures—Lugur, Yolara beside him; seven others—all of them fair-haired and all men save one who sat at the left of the priestess—an old, old woman. How old the woman was I could not tell, her face bearing traces of beauty that must once have been as great as Yolara's own, but now ravaged, in some way awesome; through its ruins the fearful, malicious gaiety shining out like a spirit of joy held within a corpse!

Larry was not present. I wondered why, but as I wondered he entered. He sent me a cheerful grin, and Yolara darted a glance at him that was revealing. Lugar saw it, too, and read it aright, for his face darkened. Began then our examination, for such it was. And as it progressed I was more and more struck by the change in the O'Keefe. All flippancy was gone; rarely did his sense of humor reveal itself in any of his answers. He was like a cautious swordsman, fencing, guarding, studying his opponent. Or rather, like a chess-player who keeps sensing some far-reaching purpose in the game; alert, contained, watchful. Always he stressed the power of our surface races, their multitudes, their solidarity.

For two hours we were questioned and then the priestess called Rador and let us go.

Larry was somber as we returned. Rador soon left us.

"One thing's sure," Larry remarked almost inconsequentially, "we've got to beat Von Hetzdorp to it. Didn't see any-

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thing of a lady named Lakla in your trip around the bazaars, did you?"

I shook my head. He walked about the room, uneasily.

"Hell's brewing here all right," he said at last, stopping before me. "I can't make out just the particular brand. That's all that bothers me. We're going to have a stiff fight, that's sure. What I want to do quick is to find the Golden Girl, Doc. Haven't seen her on the wall, lately, have you?" he queried, hopefully fantastic.

"Laugh if you want to," he went on. "But she's our best bet. It's going to be a race between her and the O'Keefe banshee, but I put my money on her.

"Lord, I'd like to have a cigarette," he said. "Spill me a little scientific dope, old dear. What is this place, anyway?"

"Well," I said. "I think it's the matrix of the moon."

"The what!" he exclaimed, with almost ludicrous amazement.

"That," I continued, "would explain these enormous, caverned spaces—scar tissue of the world, permeated with gigantic spaces as human scar tissue is often permeated with lesions beneath the scarified surface. Now these people we have encountered are undoubtedly, as poor Throckmartin divined, the remnants of that last and ancient race that built the Nan-Matal and similar Pacific structures. Undoubtedly they were forced below as their continent subsided. And here the green dwarf's statement that they made their way here 'where was the Shining One and where others before us had been' is highly suggestive."

Larry nodded, and I went on:

"That they knew nothing of the existence of the passage from the Chamber of the Moon Pool proves that they have lost much of the ancient knowledge—if, indeed, they ever possessed it.

"On the other hand, Yolara, it was clear, knows of the sinister excursions of the Dweller into the outer world."

"But knowing that, she must also know how the thing you saw comes out," Larry objected. "Besides, the place of the Moon Pool was clearly known to the builders of Nan-Tanach, who were, apparently, the forefathers of these."

"I admit that it is puzzling," I answered. "Still, neither Yolara nor Lugur did know. Perhaps the hidden road was made by the earliest of their buried kind, and the secret lost. Or it may be it was built by some of that race they found"—I had a flash of intuition—"to keep watch upon them and upon the Shining One, who may have escaped some way, somehow, their own control!"

Larry shook his head, perplexedly.

"There's some sort of scrap brewing all right," he observed. "Maybe you're right. What the devil are the 'Silent Ones'? And where is that Golden Girl who led us? Lakla, the handmaiden." His eyes grew soft and far away.

"Ask rather where is Throckmartin and his. And where the wife of Olaf," I answered, a little bruskly.

"I'm going to bed," he said abruptly. "Keep an eye on the wall, Doc!"

BETWEEN the seven sleeps that followed, Larry and I saw but little of each other. Yolara sought him more and more. Thrice we were called before the council; once we were at a great feast, whose splendors and surprises I can never forget. Largely I was in the company of Rador. Together we two passed the green barriers into the dwelling-place of the *ladala*.

And here I felt the atmosphere of hostility, of brooding calamity, stiffen into a definite upleasant reality. We went among them, but never could I force my mind through the armor of their patent hate for Rador, or at least, for what he represented.

They lived in homes—if homes the pavilions could be called—that were lesser replicas of those within the city. Those who supplied the necessities and luxuries of their rulers worked in what were, in a fashion, community houses of wood and stone.

They seemed provided with everything needful for life. But everywhere was an oppressiveness, a gathering together of hate, that was spiritual rather than material. As tangible as the latter and far, far more menacing!

"They do not like to dance with the Shining One," was Rador's constant and only reply to my efforts to find the cause.

Once I had concrete evidence of the mood. Glancing behind me, I saw a white, vengeful face peer from behind a tree-trunk, a hand lift, a shining dart speed from it straight toward Rador's back. Instinctively I thrust him aside. He turned upon me angrily. I pointed to where the little missile lay, still quivering, on the ground. He gripped my hand.

"That some day I will repay!" he said. I looked again at the thing. At its end was

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a tiny cone covered with a glistening, gelatinous substance.

Rador pulled from a tree beside us a fruit somewhat like an apple.

"Look!" he said. He dropped it upon the dart, and at once, before my eyes, in less than ten seconds, the fruit had rotted away!

"That's what would have happened to Rador but for you, friend!" he said.

Still another curious incident I must record here. I had been commenting upon the scarcity of bird-life. The only avian species I had seen so far had been a few gaily colored, tiny, songless creatures. I mentioned, unthinkingly, the golden-eyed bird that had greeted us. He gave evidence of perturbation indeed at this. He asked where we had seen it. On guard again, I told him that it had appeared when we emerged from the cliff.

"Tell that not to Yolara, nor to Lugur! And warn Larree," he said, earnestly.

I asked why. He shook his head. And then, softly, his thoughts clearly finding unconscious vent in words:

"Have the Silent Ones still the power, even as she says? Is the old wisdom yet strong? Almost do I believe, and it comes to me that I would be glad to believe. And what said Songar? That these strangers—"

He broke off and once more fell into silence.

I cite these two happenings for the light they cast upon that which I have still to tell.

Come now between this and the prelude to the latter half of the tremendous drama whose history this narrative is. The interlude, rather, between what has gone before and the second curtain soon to rise so amazingly—only scattering and necessarily fragmentary observations.

First, the nature of the ebon opacities, blocking out the spaces between the pavilion-pillars or covering their tops like roofs. These were magnetic fields, light absorbers, negativing the vibrations of radiance. Literally screens of electric force which formed as impervious a barrier to light as would have screens of steel.

They instantaneously made night appear in a place where no night was. But they interposed no obstacle to air or to sound. They were extremely simple in their inception. No more miraculous than is glass, which, inversely, admits the vibrations of light, but shuts out those coarser ones we call air and, partly, those others which produce upon auditory nerves the effects which we call sound.

There were two favored classes of the *ladala*. They were soldiers and the dream-makers. The dream-makers were the most astonishing social phenomena, I think, of all. Denied by their circumscribed environment the wider experiences of us of the outer world, the Murians had perfected an amazing system of escape through the imagination.

The dream-makers were recruited from the *ladala*, and must have been extremely powerful, far more so than the vulgar fortunetellers of earth. Because to a certain extent the sleep visions they induced were their own. Or were they?

At any rate, they led a precarious life, because if their patrons were annoyed by unpleasant sleep experiences they suffered for it either by death or by cruel beatings.

At the one feast that I attended I saw them summoned to the side of half-drunken women and men to ply their mysterious profession.

And before the sixth sleep I myself was induced by Rador to call upon one. I remember slipping straight out of this consciousness straight into another—visions of a young world—nightmare figures — steaming jungles — monsters — a bestial shaggy woman beast whom I, also a beast, loved brutally. But enough!

They were intensely musical. Their favorite instruments were double flutes; immensely complex pipe-organs; harps, great and small. They had another remarkable instrument made up of a double octave of small drums which gave forth percussions remarkably disturbing to the emotional centers.

Their development of music was, indeed, as decadent—if that be the right word to use—as the activities of the dream-makers. They were—I quote an extraordinary phrase of O'Keefe's—"jazz-jag hounds!"

It was this love of music that gave rise to one of the few truly humorous incidents of our caverned life.

Larry came to me just after our fourth sleep.

"Come on with me to a concert, Goodwin," he said.

We skimmed off to one of the bridge garrisons. Rador called the twoscore guards to attention. And then, to my utter stupefaction, the whole company, O'Keefe leading them, roared out the *"Marseillaise." "Allons, enfants de la patrie!"* they sang in a closer approach to the French than

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might have been expected ten or fifty miles below France's level. *"Marchons! Marchons!"* they bellowed.

It was irresistibly funny; and in my laughter I forgot for the moment my forebodings.

"Just wait until you hear Yolara lisp a pretty little thing I taught her," said Larry as we set back for what we now called home. There was an impish twinkle in his eyes.

And I did hear. For it was not many minutes after that the priestess condescended to command me to come to her with O'Keefe.

"Show Goodwin how much you have learned of our speech, O lady of the lips of honeyed flame!" murmured Larry.

She hesitated; smiled at him, and then from that perfect mouth, out of the exquisite throat, in the voice that was like the chiming of little silver bells, she trilled a melody that was very familiar to me:

"She's only a bird in a gilded cage,
A bee-yu-tiful sight to see—"

And so on to the bitter end. I did not dare to look at O'Keefe.

"She thinks it's a love-song," said Larry when we had left.

Through those seven sleeps there was no sign either of Olaf or of Von Hetzdorp. Always, when we asked Yolara, she said that they were both well and content. Nor was there sign of the Golden Girl.

And ever the passion light in the eyes of the priestess grew stronger, more perilous, when she looked upon Larry O'Keefe. And steadily the face of Lugur grew more forbidding.

Then at last came the summons to that tragic interlude which was to be the curtain raiser to the dread, the incredible, the glorious finale of our amazing adventure.

CHAPTER IX

THE AMPHITHEATER OF HELL

FOR hours the black-haired folk had been streaming across the bridges, flowing along the promenade by scores and by hundreds, drifting down toward the gigantic seven-terraced temple whose interior I had never as yet seen, and from whose towering exterior, indeed, I had always been kept far enough away —unobtrusively, but none the less decisively—to prevent any real observation. The structure, I had estimated, nevertheless, could not reach less than a thousand feet above its silvery base, and the diameter of its circular foundation was about the same.

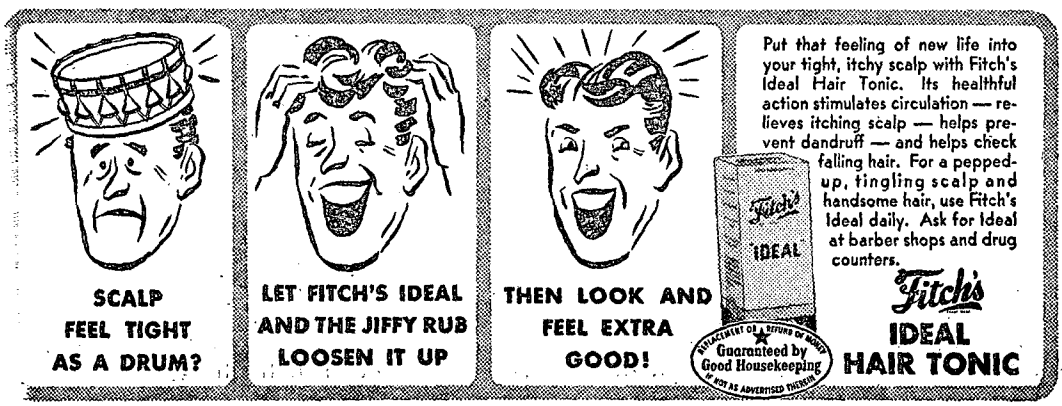
I wondered what it was that was bringing the *ladala* into Lora, and where were they vanishing. All of them were flower-crowned with the luminous, lovely blooms. Old and young, slender, mocking-eyed girls, dwarfed youths, mothers with their babes, gnomed oldsters—on they poured, silent for the most part and sullen. A sullenness that held acid bitterness even as their subtle, half-sinister, half-gay malice seemed tempered into little keen-edged flames, oddly, menacingly defiant.

Wondering still, I turned from my point of observation and made my way back to our pavilion, hoping that Larry, who had been with Yolara for the past two hours, had returned. Hardly had I reached it before Rador came hurrying up, in his manner a curious exultance.

"Come!" he commanded before I could speak. "The council has made decision, and Larree is awaiting you."

"What has been decided?" I panted as we sped along the mosaicked path that led to the house of Yolara.

"The Shining One dances!" had answered Rador. "And you are to worship!"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"Lugur was against it," he whispered as we went swiftly on. "The Shining One's Voice said 'No,' but the Shining One's priestess said 'Yes'; and the council thought at last, and as usual, as she did. What the Shining One may think, friend Goodwin, I do not know"—he shot a mocking glance at me—"but Yolara with you, there is no fear that you will join the dance," he added hastily, and obviously with reassuring intention.

What was this dancing of the Shining One, of which so often he had spoken? And in it, what was there for us of the deadly, inexplicable danger that had blasted Throckmartin and his and destroyed the wife and child of Olaf? Would we meet at this ceremony, whatever it was, those I had come here to find?

Whatever my forebodings, Larry evidently had none.

"Great stuff!" he cried, when we had met in the great antechamber, now empty of the dwarfs. "We're invited to the show. Reserved seats and all the rest of it. Hope it will be worth seeing. Have to be something damned good, though, to catch me."

And remembering, with a little shock of apprehension, that he had no knowledge of the Dweller beyond my poor description of it—for there are no words actually to describe what that miracle of interwoven glory and horror was—I wondered what Larry O'Keefe would say and do when he did behold it!

Rador began to show impatience.

"Come!" he urged. "There is much to be done, and the time grows short!"

He led us to a tiny fountain room, in whose miniature pool the white waters were concentrated, pearl-like and opalescent in their circling rim.

"Bathe!" he commanded; and set the example by stripping himself and plunging within. We followed. I experienced the peculiar stimulation that these waters always gave. They seemed to sparkle through every nerve and muscle. Only a minute or two did the green dwarf allow us, and he checked us as we were about to don our clothing.

Their texture was soft, but decidedly metallic, like some blue metal spun to the fineness of a spider's thread. My garment buckled tightly at the throat, was girdled at the waist, and, below this cincture, fell to the floor, its folds being held together by a half-dozen looped cords; from the shoulders a hood resembling a monk's cowl.

Rador cast this over my head; it completely covered my face, but was of so transparent a texture that I could see, though somewhat mistily, through it. Finally he handed us both a pair of long gloves of the same material and high stockings, the feet of which were gloved—five-toed.

And again his laughter rang out at our manifest surprise.

"The priestess of the Shining One does not altogether trust the Shining One's Voice," he said at last. "And these are to guard against any sudden—errors. And fear not, Goodwin," he went on kindly. "Not for the Shining One itself would Yolara see harm come to Larree here—nor, because of him, to you. But I would not stake much on her heart toward the Double Tongue whom Lugur has claimed, nor to the great white one. And for the last I am sorry, for him I do like well."

"Are they to be with us?" asked Larry eagerly.

"They are to be where we go," replied the dwarf soberly. "For Double Tongue there is no more peril than for you. Lugur stands with him; but for the other—" He was silent.

Grimly Larry reached down and drew from his uniform his automatic. He popped a fresh clip into the pocket fold of his girdle. The pistol he slung high up beneath his armpit. Now O'Keefe had cautioned me against revealing my weapon, and had, up till now, kept his own concealed.

"When we do need 'em, we're certain to have a bunch of odds against us, Doc," he had said. "And the element of surprise will be mighty valuable to us. Keep 'em under cover till we have to use 'em; then shoot straight!"

Therefore I wondered why Larry was showing his hand. The green dwarf looked at the weapon curiously. O'Keefe tapped it, and as he spoke I understood.

"Listen, Rador," he said. "I like you, and I believe you like us."

The dwarf nodded emphatically.

"This," said Larry, "slays quicker than the *Keth*. I take it so no harm shall come to the blue-eyed one whose name is Olaf. If I should raise it, be you not in its way, Rador!" he added significantly.

The dwarf nodded again, his eyes sparkling. He thrust a hand out to both of us.

"A change comes," he said. "What it is I know not, nor how it will fall. But this remember—Rador is more friend to you than you yet can know. And now let us go!" he ended abruptly.

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He led us, not through the entrance, but into a sloping passage ending up in a blind wall; touched a symbol graven there, and it opened, precisely as had the rosy barrier of the Moon Pool Chamber. And, just as there, but far smaller, was a passage end, a low curved wall facing a shaft, not black as had been that abode of living darkness, but faintly luminescent. Rador leaned over the wall.

O'Keefe winked at me. The mechanism clicked and started; the door swung shut; the sides of the car slipped into place, and we swept swiftly down the passage. Overhead the wind whistled. Rador turned toward us.

"Have no fear," he began, and then, for the green dwarf was keen, was aware without doubt of our lack of surprise he started again to speak, shrugged his shoulders, and turned his back. Our speed was great and the journey not long. In a few moments the moving platform began to slow down. It stopped in a closed chamber no larger than itself.

Rador drew from his girdle a ring and then, finding what he sought, although I could see nothing on its smooth surface, drew his poniard and struck twice with its hilt. Immediately a panel moved away, revealing a space filled with faint, misty blue radiance. And at each side of the opened portal stood four of the dwarfish men, gray-headed, old, clad in a flowing garment of white; each pointing toward us a short silver rod.

Rador drew from his girdle a ring and held it out to the first dwarf. He examined it, lowered his rod, handed it to the one beside him, and not until each had examined the ring did each lower his curious weapon; containers of that terrific energy they called the *Keth*, I thought.

We stepped out; the doors closed behind us. The place was weird enough. Its pave was a greenish-blue stone resembling lapis lazuli. On each side were high pedestals holding carved figures of the same material. There were perhaps a score of these, but in the mistiness I could not make out their outlines. A droning, rushing roar beat upon our ears; filled the whole cavern.

"I smell the sea," said Larry suddenly.

And then I, too, realized that the tang of ocean was strong. I felt its moisture upon my face and hands. Rador spoke again to the leader of—the priests—as I now began to think them. Four leading the way and four following us, we marched forward. The floor arose gradually, and the rushing roar grew louder, the sea breath stronger.

And now the roaring became deep-toned, clamorous, and close in front of us a rift opened. Twenty feet in width, it cut the cavern floor and vanished into the blue mist on each side. The priests leading us knelt, Rador imitating them; O'Keefe nudged me, and we, too, dropped to our knees. We arose and went forward. Before us the cleft was spanned by one solid slab of rock not more than two yards wide. It had neither railing nor other protection.

The four leading priests marched out upon it one by one, and we followed. In the middle of the span they stopped and again we knelt. Ten feet beneath us was a torrent of blue sea-water racing with terrific speed between polished walls. It gave the impression of vast depth. It roared as it sped by, and far to the right was a low arch through which it disappeared.

It was so swift that its surface shone like polished blue steel, and from it came the blessed, our worldly, familiar ocean breath that strengthened my soul amazingly and made me realize how earth-sick I was. Larry, too, drew himself up, drawing deep breaths.

Whence came the stream? I marveled, forgetting for the moment as we passed on again, all else. Were we closer to the surface of the earth than I had thought, or was this some mighty stream falling through an opening in sea floor, Heaven alone knew how many miles above us, losing itself in deeper abysses beyond these? How near and how far this was from the truth I was to learn, and never did truth come to man in more dreadful guise!

The roaring fell away, the blue haze lessened. In front of us stretched a wide flight of steps, huge as those which had let us into the courtyard of Nan-Tanach through the ruined sea-gate. We scaled it; it narrowed; from above light poured through a still narrower opening. Side by side Larry and I passed out of it.

HOW can I describe what I saw? Two things there are before which I falter —to picture that temple of the Shining One as it first met our eyes in all its incredible immensity, and what happened there; and that thing to come to pass, that twilight of the gods, in the abode of the Silent Ones on the Sea of Crimson. But I must attempt it, knowing full well that it is impossible to make clear one-tenth of

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their grandeur, their awfulness, their soul-shaking terror.

We had emerged upon an enormous platform of what seemed to be glistening ivory. It stretched before us for a hundred yards or more and then shelved gently into the white waters. Opposite, not a mile away, was that prodigious web of woven rainbows Rador had called the curtain of the Shining One. There it shone in all its unearthly grandeur, on each side of the Cyclopean pillars, as though a mountain should stretch up arms raising between them a fairy banner of auroral glories—in front the curved, simitar sweep of the pier with its clustered, gleaming temples.

Before that brief, fascinated glance was done, there dropped upon my soul a sensation as of brooding weight intolerable. A spiritual oppression as though some vastness was falling, pressing, stifling me. I turned, and Larry caught me as I reeled.

"Steady! Steady, old man!" he whispered.

At first all that my staggering consciousness could realize was an immensity, an immeasurable uprearing, that brought with it the same throat-gripping vertigo as comes from gazing downward from some great height. Then a blur of white faces, intolerable shinings of hundreds upon thousands of eyes. Huge, incredibly huge, a colossal amphitheater of jet, a stupendous semi-circle held within its mighty arc the ivory platform on which I stood.

It reared itself almost perpendicularly hundreds of feet up into the sparkling heavens, and thrust down on each side its ebon bulwarks, like monstrous paws. Now, the giddiness from its sheer greatness passing, I saw that it was indeed an amphitheater, sloping slightly backward tier after tier. And that the white blur of faces against its blackness, the gleaming of countless eyes, were those of myriads of the people who sat silent, flower-garlanded, their gaze focused upon the rainbow curtain and sweeping over me like a torrent—tangible, appalling!

Five hundred feet beyond, the smooth, high retaining wall of the amphitheater raised itself. Above it was the first terrace of seats, and above this, dividing the tiers for another half a thousand feet upward, set within them like a panel, was a dead-black surface in which shone faintly with a bluish radiance a gigantic disk. Above it and around it a cluster of innumerable smaller ones.

On each side of me, bordering the platform, were scores of small pillared alcoves; a low wall stretching across their fronts; delicate, fretted grills shielding them, save where in each lattice an opening stared. It came to me that they were like those stalls in ancient Gothic cathedrals wherein for centuries had kneeled paladins and people of my own race on earth's fair face.

And within these alcoves were gathered, score upon score, the elfin beauties, the dwarfish men, of the fair-haired folk. At my right, a few feet from the opening through which we had come, a passageway led back between the fretted stalls. Halfway between us and the massive base of the amphitheater a dais rose. Up the platform to it a wide ramp ascended. And on ramp and dais and along the center of the gleaming platform down to where it kissed the white waters, a broad ribbon of the radiant flowers lay like a fairy carpet.

On one side of this, meshed in a silken web that hid no line or curve of her sweet body, white flesh gleaming through its folds, stood Yolara. And opposite her, crowned with a circlet of flashing blue stones, was Lugur!

O'Keefe drew a long breath; Rador touched my arm and, still dazed, I let myself be drawn into the aisle and through a corridor that ran behind the alcoves. At the back of one of these the green dwarf paused, opened a door, and motioned us within.

Entering, I found that we were exactly opposite where the ramp met the dais, and that Yolara was not more than fifty feet away. She glanced at O'Keefe and smiled. I noted her extraordinary exhilaration. Her eyes were ablaze with little dancing points of light. Her body seemed to palpitate, the rounded delicate muscles beneath the translucent skin seemed to run with little eager waves. She seemed—what is the word the Scotch use?—*fey!* Suddenly Larry whistled softly.

"There's Von Hetzdorp!" he said.

I looked where he pointed. Opposite us sat the German; clothed as we were. He was leaning forward, his eyes eager behind his glasses. But if he saw us he gave no sign.

"And there's Olaf!" said O'Keefe.

Beneath the carved stall in which sat the German was an aperture. Unprotected by pillars, or by grills, opening clear upon the platform, near it stretched the trail of flowers up to the great dais which Lugur the Voice and Yolara the Priestess

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guarded. Nor was Olaf clad as we. His mighty torso covered with a white tunic stuffed into his old dungarees, his feet bare, he sat immobile, staring out toward the prismatic veil. And in his eyes, even at that distance, I could see a flare of consuming hatred. So he sat alone, and my heart went out to him.

O'Keefe's face softened.

"Bring him here," he said to Rador.

The green dwarf was looking at the Norseman, too, a shade of pity upon his mocking face. He shook his head.

"Wait!" he said. "You can do nothing now, and it may be there will be no need to do anything," he added. But I could feel that there was little of conviction in his words.

YOLARA drew herself up; threw her white arms high. From the mountainous tiers came a mighty sigh; a ripple ran through them. And upon the moment, before Yolara's arms fell, there issued, apparently from the air around us, a peal of sound that might have been the shouting of some playful god hurling great suns through the net of stars. It was like the deepest notes of all the organs in the world combined in one; summoning, majestic, cosmic!

It held within it the thunder of the spheres rolling through the infinite, the birth-song of suns made manifest in the womb of space; echoes of creation's supernal chord! It shook the body like a pulse from the heart of the universe—pulsed—and died away.

On its death came a blaring as of all the trumpets of conquering hosts since the first Pharaoh led his swarms—triumphal, compelling! Alexander's clamoring hosts, brazen-throated wolf-horns of Caesar's legions, blare of trumpets of Genghis Khan and his golden horde, clangor of the locust swarms of Tamerlane, bugles of Napoleon's armies—war-shout of all earth's conquerors! And it died!

Fast upon it, a throbbing, muffled tumult of harp sounds, mellownesses of myriads of wood horns, the subdued sweet shrilling of multitudes of flutes, Pandean pipings—inviting, carrying with them the calling of waterfalls in the hidden place, rushing brooks and murmuring forest winds—calling, calling, langorous, lulling, dripping into the brain like the very honeyed essence of sound.

And after them a silence in which the memory of the music seemed to beat, to beat, ever more faintly, through every quivering nerve.

From me all fear, all apprehension, had fled. In their place was nothing but joyous anticipation, a supernal freedom from even the shadow of the shadow of care or sorrow.

Once more the first great note pealed out! As once more it died, from the clustered spheres a kaledoscopic blaze shot as though drawn from the majestic sound itself.

The many-colored rays darted across the white waters and sought the face of the irised veil. As they touched, it sparkled, flamed, wavered, and shook with fountains of prismatic color.

The light increased, and in its intensity the silver air darkened. Faded into shadow that white mosaic of flower-crowned faces set in the amphitheater of jet, and vast shadows dropped upon the high-flung tiers and shrouded them. But on the skirts of the rays the fretted stalls in which we sat with the fair-haired ones blazed out, iridescent, like jewels.

I was sensible of an acceleration of every pulse; a wild stimulation of every nerve. I felt myself being lifted above the world—close to the threshold of the high gods—soon their essence and their power would stream out into me! I glanced at Larry. His face was transformed. He was like Balder the Beautiful. Wonderful as one of those olden half gods of his own beloved isle! His eyes were wild with life! And Yolara—I cannot describe her, but as her face turned toward his I saw in the joy of her own eyes infernal allure and a passion withering.

I looked at Olaf, and in his face was none of this. Only hate, and hate, and hate.

The peacock waves streamed out over the waters, cleaving the seeming darkness, a rainbow path of glory. And the veil flashed as though all the rainbows that had ever shone were burning within it. Again the mighty sound pealed.

Into the center of the veil the light drew itself, grew into an intolerable brightness. And with a storm of tinklings, a tempest of crystalline notes, a tumult of tiny chimings, through it sped—the Shining One!

Straight down that radiant path, with its high-flung plumes of feathery flame shimmering, its coruscating spirals whirling, its seven globes of seven colors shining above its glowing core, it raced toward us. The hurricane of bells of dia-

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mond glass were jubilant, joyous, I felt O'Keefe grip my arm; Yolara threw her white arms out in a welcoming gesture; I heard from the tiers a sigh of rapture —and in it poignant, wailing undertone of agony!

And over the waters, down the light stream, to the end of the ivory pier, flew the Shining One. Through its crystal pizzicati drifted inarticulate murmurings. Deadly sweet, stilling the heart and setting it leaping madly.

For a moment it paused, poised itself, and then came whirling down the flower path to its priestess, slowly, ever more slowly. It passed Olaf, and I saw his hands clench until the knuckles whitened. Saw his mighty chest swell with the terrific restrained impulse to leap out upon it!

It passed, hovered for a moment between the woman and the dwarf, as though contemplating them; turned to her with its storm of tinklings softened, its murmurings infinitely caressing. Bent toward it, Yolara seemed to gather within herself pulsing waves of power; she was terrifying, gloriously, maddeningly evil; and as gloriously, maddeningly heavenly! Aphrodite and the Virgin! Tanith of the Carthaginians and St. Bride of the Isles! Succubus and angel! A queen of hell and a princess of heaven, in one!

Only for a moment did that which we had called the Dweller and that these named the Shining One, pause. It swept up the ramp to the dais, rested there, slowly turning, plumes and spirals lacing and unlacing, throbbing, pulsing. Now its nucleus grew plainer, stronger—human in a fashion, and all inhuman. Neither man nor woman; neither god nor devil; subtly partaking of all. Nor could I doubt that whatever it was, within that shining nucleus was something sentient; something that had will and energy, and in some awful, supernormal fashion—intelligence!

Another trumpeting—a sound of stones opening—a long, low wail of utter anguish. Something moved shadowy in the river of light; and slowly at first, then ever more rapidly, shapes swam through it. There were half a score of them—girls and youths, women and men. And I knew that these were sacrifices thrust out to the god. As they drew on, the Shining One poised itself, regarded them. They drew closer, and in the eyes of each and in their faces was the bud of that strange intermingling of emotions, of joy and sorrow, ecstasy and terror, that I had seen in full blossom on Throckmartin's.

The Thing began again its murmurings, now infinitely caressing, coaxing—like the song of a siren from some witched star! And the bell sounds rang out—compellingly, calling—calling—calling—

I saw Olaf lean far out of his place. Saw, half-consciously, at Lugur's signal, three of the dwarfs creep in and take place, unnoticed, behind him. But in the fire of my interest the sight was burned instaneously from my mind.

Now the first of the swift figures rushed upon the dais, and paused. But only for a moment. It was the girl who had been brought before Yolara, when the gnome named Songar was driven into nothingness! With all the quickness of light a spiral of the Shining One stretched out and encircled her.

At its touch there was an infinitely dreadful shrinking and, it seemed, a simultaneous hurling of herself into its radiance. And as it wrapped its swirls around her, permeated her, the crystal chorus burst forth tumultuously; through and through her the radiance pulsed.

Began then that infinitely dreadful, but infinitely glorious, rhythm they called the dance of the Shining One. And as the girl swirled within its sparkling mists, another and another flew into its embrace, until, at last, the dais was an incredible vision; a mad star's Witches' Sabbath, phantasmagoric, Macaberesque. An altar of white faces and bodies gleaming through living flame; transfused with rapture insupportable and horror that was hellish. And ever, radiant plumes and spirals expanding, the core of the Shining One waxed, growing greater as it consumed, as it drew into and through itself the life-force of these lost ones!

So they spun there, interlaced, souls caught in the monstrous web and there began to pulse from them life, vitality, as though the very essence of nature was filling us. Dimly I recognized that what I was beholding was vampirism inconceivable! The banked tiers chanted. The mighty sounds pealed forth! It was a Saturnalia of demigods—Yolara transformed beyond semblance of earth—her beauty flaring out into unholy and devilish, and at once holy and wondrous fulfilment impossible to tell.

Whirling, murmuring, bell-notes storming, the Shining One began to pass from the dais down the ramp, still embracing, still interwoven with those who had thrown

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themselves into its spirals. They drew along with it as though half carried; in dreadful dance; white faces sealed forever—into that semblance of those who held within linked God and devil. I covered my eyes!

And the Shining One passed—passed on—was beside Olaf—

I heard a gasp from O'Keefe; opened my eyes and sought his; saw the madness depart from them as he strained forward. Olaf had leaned far out, and as he did so two of the dwarfs beside him caught him, and whether by design or through his own swift, involuntary movement, thrust him half into the Dweller's path. The Dweller paused in its gyrations—seemed to watch him.

The Norseman's face was crimson, his eyes blazing. He threw himself back and, with one mad, defiant shout, gripped one of the dwarfs about the middle and sent him hurtling through the air, straight at the radiant thing! A whirling mass of legs and arms, the dwarf flew—then in midflight stopped as though some gigantic invisible hand had caught him, and—was dashed—it came to me as one would dash a great spider, with prodigious force, down upon the platform not a yard from the Shining One!

And like a broken spider he moved feebly, once, twice. From the Dweller shot a shimmering tentacle—touched him—recoiled. Its crystal tinklings changed into an angry chiming. From all about—jeweled stalls and jet peak—came a sigh of incredulous horror.

And all the while those dead-alive, who had danced with the Shining One, turned slowly within its sparkling mist. Faces devoid of all human semblance, turning, slowly in its coruscating net—*chatoyant*—like fireflies in gleaming, swirling mist—God!

"God!" The echo of an invocation came from O'Keefe. "Olaf threw him short!" But I knew that was not what had stopped his flight!

Lugur, his face gray, all exaltation gone from it, leaped forward. On the instant Larry was over the low barrier between the pillars, rushing to the Norseman's side. And even as they ran there was another wild shout from Olaf, and he hurled himself out, straight at the throat of the Dweller!

But before he could touch the Shining One, now motionless—and never was the thing more horrible than then, with the purely human suggestion of surprise plain in its poise—Larry had struck him aside.

I tried to follow, and was held by Rador. He was trembling, but not with fear. In his face was incredulous hope, inexplicable eagerness.

"Wait!" he said. "Wait!"

THE Shining One stretched out a slow spiral, and as it did so I saw the bravest thing man has ever witnessed. Instantly O'Keefe thrust himself between it and Olaf, pistol out. The tentacle touched him, and the dull blue of his robe flashed out into blinding, intense azure light. From the automatic in his gloved hand came three quick bursts of flame straight into the Thing. The Dweller drew back; the bell-sounds swelled angrily.

And all that time its prey, unheeding, white-faced, transfigured—turned—turned slowly in its radiant web. Can I ever forget!

Then I saw Lugur pause, his hand darted up, and in it was one of the silver *Keth* cones. But before he could flash it upon the Norseman, Larry had unlooped his robe, thrown its fold over Olaf, and holding him with one hand away from the Shining One, thrust with the other his pistol into the dwarf's stomach. His lips moved, but I could not hear what he said. But Lugur seemed to understand, for his hand dropped.

Now Yolara was there—all this had taken barely more than five seconds. She thrust herself between the three men and the apparition, of which she was priestess. She spoke to it, and the wild buzzing died down; the gay crystal tinklings burst forth again. The Thing murmured to her, began to whirl faster, faster. It passed down the ivory pier, out upon the waters, bearing with it, meshed in its light, the sacrifice. It swept on ever more swiftly, triumphantly—and vanished; turning, turning, with its ghastly crew, through the Veil!

Abruptly the polychromatic path snapped out. The silver light poured in upon us. From all the amphitheater arose a clamor, a shouting. Von Hetzdorp, his eyes staring, was leaning out, listening. Unrestrained now by Rador, I vaulted the wall and rushed forward. But not before I heard the green dwarf murmur:

"There is something stronger than the Shining One! Two things—yea—a strong heart—and hate!"

Olaf, panting, eyes glazed, trembling, shrank beneath my hand.

"The devil that took my Helma!" I heard

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him whispering. "The Shining Devil!"

"Both these men," Lugur was raging, "they shall dance with the Shining One. And this one, too." He pointed at me malignantly.

"This man is mine," said the priestess, and her voice was icily menacing. She rested her hand on Larry's shoulder. "He shall not dance. No—nor shall his friend. I have told you I care not for this one!" She pointed to Olaf.

"Neither this man, nor this," said Larry, his pistol still pressed against Lugur, "shall be harmed. This is my word, Yolara!"

She looked at him.

"Even so," she said quietly, "my lord!"

Lugur's eyes grew hellish, and I saw Von Hetzdorp stare at O'Keefe with a new, a curiously speculative interest.

"I have said it!" She turned to Lugur. "What can you do?" she added quite insolently.

He raised his arms as though to strike her. Her hand swept to her bosom. Larry's pistol probbed him rudely enough.

"No rough stuff now, kid!" said O'Keefe in English. The red dwarf quivered, turned —caught a robe from a priest standing by, and threw it over himself. The *ladala*, shouting, gesticulating, fighting with the soldiers, were jostling down from the tiers of jet.

"Come!" commanded Yolara—her eyes rested upon Larry. "Your heart is great, indeed, my lord!" she murmured; and her voice was very sweet. "Come!"

"This man comes with us, Yolara," said O'Keefe, pointing to Olaf.

"Bring him," she said. "What you have done, and what may come from what you have done, I know not." She laughed. "But compared to what I think that will be, this man is but a straw in a torrent. So bring him. Only tell him to look no more upon me as before!" she added fiercely.

Beside her the three of us passed along the stalls, where sat the fair-haired, now silent, at gaze, as though in the grip of some great doubt. Silently Olaf strode beside me. Rador had disappeared. Down the stairway, through the hall of turquoise mist, over the rushing sea-stream we went and stood beside the wall through which we had entered. The white-robed ones had fled.

Yolara pressed; the portal opened. We stepped upon the car; Yolara took the lever; the walls flashed by—and dazed, troubled, I, at least, more than half-incredulous as to the reality of it all, we sped through the faintly luminous corridor to the house of the priestess.

And as we sped I, too, wondered what it was that Olaf had done, and what was to come of it.

But one thing I wondered about no more. Sick at heart and soul, the truth had come to me. No more need to search for Throckmartin. Behind that Veil, in the lair of the Dweller, dead-alive like those we had just seen swim in its shining train was he, and Edith, Stanton and Thora and Olaf Huldricksson's wife.

CHAPTER X

"THE *ladala* ARE AWAKE"

NO WORD was spoken during the swift journey. The webs that clothed Yolara streamed out behind her like little filmy pennons. She stared ahead, strangely exalted, brows drawn in one delicate line above eyes now deepest blue. O'Keefe watched her, and from his beauty-loving soul one could see admiration creep up and stand at gaze. Upon Olaf's grim face a shade of greater grimness fell; his jaw hardened. Whatever Larry's change of heart might be, I thought, it found no echo in the Norseman's breast.

The car came to rest; the portal opened; Yolara leaped out lightly, beckoned and flitted up the corridor. She paused before an ebon screen. At a touch it vanished, revealing an entrance to a small blue chamber, glowing as though cut from the heart of some gigantic sapphire; bare, save that in its center, upon a low pedestal, stood a great globe fashioned from milky rock-crystal. Upon its surface were faint tracings as of seas and continents, but, if so, either of some other world or of this world in immemorial past, for in no way did they resemble our earth.

Poised upon the globe, rising from it out into space, locked in each other's arms, lips to lips, were two figures, a woman and a man, so exquisite, so lifelike, that for the moment I failed to realize that they, too, were carved of the crystal. And before this shrine—for nothing else could it be, I knew—three slender cones raised themselves: one of purest white flame, one of opalescent water, and the third of —moonlight! There was no mistaking them, the height of a tall man each stood. But how water, flame, and light were held so evenly, so steadily in their spire-shapes, I could not tell.

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Before this shrine Yolara bowed lowly —once, twice, thrice. She turned to O'Keefe. Nor by slightest look or gesture betrayed she knew others were there than he. The blue eyes wide, searching, unfathomable, she drew close; put white hands on his shoulders, looked down into his very soul—and I saw a shadow dim their azure brilliance.

"Not yet," she whispered. "Not yet is your heart mine!" She was silent again for a space, regarding him.

"My lord," at last she murmured. "Now listen well, for I, Yolara, offer you three things. Myself, and the Shining One, and the power that is the Shining One's. Yea, and still a fourth thing that is all three. Power over all upon that world from whence ye came! These, my lord, ye shall have. I swear it"—she turned toward the altar, uplifted her arms—"by Siya and by Siyana, and by the flame, by the water, and by the light!"

She bent toward him once more, drew still closer.

"Not yet is that heart of yours mine!" she repeated softly. "Yet shall it be! And that, too, I swear by Siya and by Siyana, and by the flame, by the water, and by the light!"

Her eyes grew purple dark. "And let none dare to take you from me! Nor ye go from me unbidden!" she whispered fiercely.

And then swiftly, still ignoring us, she threw her arms about O'Keefe, pressed her white body to his breast, lips raised, eyes closed seeking his. O'Keefe's arms tightened around her, his head dropped lips seeking, finding hers—passionately! From Olaf came a deep indrawn breath that was almost a groan. But not in *my* heart could I find blame for the Irishman.

The priestess opened eyes now all misty blue, thrust him back, stood regarding him.

O'Keefe, face dead-white, raised a trembling hand to his face.

"And thus have I sealed my oath, O my lord!" she whispered. For the first time she seemed to recognize our presence, stared at us a moment, and then through us, turned to O'Keefe.

"Go, now!" she said. "Soon Rador shall come for you. Then—well, after that let happen what will!"

She smiled once more at him, so sweetly; turned toward the figures upon the great globe; sank upon her knees before them. Quietly we crept away; in utter silence we passed through the anteroom, still deserted; found the head of the mosaicked path, and, still silent, made our way to the little pavilion.

But as we passed along we heard a tumult from the green roadway; shouts of men, now and then a woman's scream. Through a rift in the garden I glimpsed a jostling crowd on one of the bridges; green dwarfs struggling with the *ladala*. And all about, droned a humming as of a giant hive disturbed!

LARRY threw himself down upon one of the divans, covered his face with his hands, dropped them to catch in Olaf's eyes troubled reproach, looked at me.

"*I* couldn't help it," he said, half-defiantly, half-miserably. "God, what a woman! I *couldn't* help it!" He walked about the room restlessly. "What do you suppose she meant by offering me that shining devil they worship in this cross-section of beautiful hell?" he demanded, halting. "And what did she mean about 'power over all the world'?"

"Larry," I said, "why didn't you tell her you didn't love her, then?"

He gazed at me, the old twinkle back in his eye.

"Spoken like a scientist, Doc!" he exclaimed. "I suppose if a burning angel struck you out of nowhere and threw itself about you, you would most dignifiedly tell it you didn't want to be burned. For God's sake, don't talk nonsense, Goodwin!" he ended, almost peevishly.

"But if it was a bad angel, a beautiful devil—*djaevelsk*—and she should come to you, and you know her a devil, and your soul the price of her kisses—would you kiss or slay her?" Thus Olaf, heavily, sadly. Larry glanced at him, troubled.

"Ja!" said Olaf. "I have heard. I have listened to that *Trolde* Lugur and to Von Hetzdorp. They did not know I could understand them—no! I crept about and listened. And I know, *ja!* Evil! All evil that woman, and Helvede snarling at these gates, made to be loosed on our world above!"

"We'd better just forget why I kissed the lady and hear what Olaf's got to say, Doc," said O'Keefe.

"It was when the woman, the wonder-witch, broke—*adsprede*—the oldster—" began Olaf. He stopped, peering down the path—made a gesture of caution, relapsed into sullen silence. There were footsteps on the path, and into sight came Rador, but a Rador changed. Gone was every vestige of his mockery; his face all serious,

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curiously solemn, he saluted O'Keefe and Olaf with that salute which, before this, I had seen given only to Yolara and to Lugur. There came from faraway a swift quickening of the tumult.

"The *ladala* are awake!" he said. "So much for what two brave men can do!" He paused thoughtfully. "Bones and dust jostle not each other for place against the grave wall," he added oddly. "But if bones and dust have revealed to them that they still—live—"

He stopped abruptly, eyes seeking the globe that bore and sent forth speech.

"The *Afyo Maie* has sent me to watch over you till she summons you," he announced clearly. A vestige of raillery flitted over his face. "There is to be a feast. You, Larree, you, Goodwin, are to come. I remain here with Olaf."

"No harm to him!" broke in O'Keefe sharply. Rador touched his heart, his eyes.

"By the Ancient Ones, and my my love for you, and by what you twain did before the Shining One, I swear it!" he answered. O'Keefe, satisfied, thrust him his hand.

Rador clasped palms; a soldier came round the path, in his grip a long flat box of polished wood. The green dwarf took it, dismissed him, threw open the lid.

"Here is your apparel for the feast, Larree," he said, pointing to the contents.

O'Keefe stared, reached down and drew out a white, shimmering, softly metallic, long-sleeved tunic, a broad, silvery girdle, leg swathings of the same argent material, and sandals that seemed to be cut out from silver. He made a quick gesture of angry dissent.

"Nay, Larree!" whispered the dwarf. "Wear them. I counsel it. I pray it. Ask me not why," he went on swiftly, looking again at the globe.

O'Keefe, as I, was impressed by his earnestness. The dwarf made a curiously expressive pleading gesture. O'Keefe abruptly took the garments; passed into the room of the fountain.

"What is the feast, Rador?" I asked. "The Shining One dances not again?" I added.

"No," he said. "No"—he hesitated—"it is the usual feast that follows the—sacrament! Lugur, and Double Tongue, who came with you, will be there," he added slowly.

"Lugur!" I gasped in astonishment. "After what happened, he will be there?"

"Perhaps because of what happened, Goodwin, my friend," he answered, his eyes again full of malice, "and there will be others. Friends of Yolara. Friends of Lugur. And perhaps another." His voice was almost inaudible. "One whom they have not called." He halted, half-fearfully, glancing at the globe; put finger to lips and spread himself out upon one of the couches.

"Strike up the band," came O'Keefe's voice. "Here comes the hero!"

The curtains parted and he strode into the room. I am bound to say that the admiration in Rador's eyes was reflected in my own, and even, if involuntarily, in Olaf's. For in the gleaming silver garb the Irishman was truly splendid. Long, lithe, clean-limbed, his keen, dark face smiling, he shone in contrast with Rador, and would, I knew, be among those other dwarfish men as was Cuchullin, son of Lerg, beloved of the Dark Queen Scathach, among the Pictish trolls.

"Now," Rador said grimly, "Let the Silent Ones show their power, if they still have it!"

And with this strange benediction perplexing me, we passed on.

"For heaven's sake, Larry," I urged as we approached the house of the priestess, "you'll be careful!"

As we ascended the serpent steps Von Hezdorp suddenly appeared. The blue robes were gone. He was clothed in gay green tunic and leg-swathings. And odd enough he looked in them, with his owl-rimmed spectacles and his pointed Teutonic beard. He gave a signal to our guards, and I wondered what influence the German had attained, for promptly, without question, they drew aside. At me he smiled amiably.

He turned to O'Keefe.

"Lieutenant, I would like to speak to you —alone!"

"I've no secrets from Goodwin," answered O'Keefe.

"So?" queried Von Hetzdorp, suavely. He bent, whispered to Larry.

The Irishman started, eyed him with a certain shocked incredulity, then turned to me.

"Just a minute, Doc!" he said, and I caught the suspicion of a wink. They drew aside, out of ear-shot. The German talked rapidly. Larry was all attention. Von Hetzdorp's earnestness became intense. O'Keefe interrupted—appeared to question.

Von Hetzdorp, without another look at me, turned and went quickly within. The guards took their places, and we passed on to face whatever it was that fate held for us.

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Weird—weird beyond all telling—was the exquisite head floating there in the air.

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I looked at Larry inquiringly.

"Don't ask a thing now, Doc!" he said tensely. "Wait till we get damned busy and quick—I'll tell you that now—"

WE PAUSED before thick curtains, through which came the faint murmur of many voices. They parted; out came two ushers. I suppose they were that in cuirasses and kilts that reminded me somewhat of chain-mail—the first armor of any kind here that I had seen. They held open the folds, bowed, and as we entered fell in behind us.

The chamber on whose threshold we stood was far larger than either anteroom or hall of audience. Not less than three hundred feet long and half that in depth, from end to end of it ran two huge semi-circular tables, paralleling each other, divided by a wide aisle, and heaped with flowers, with fruits, with viands unknown to me, and glittering with crystal flagons, beakers, goblets of as many hues as the blooms. And on the gay-cushioned couches that flanked the tables, lounging luxuriously, were scores of the members of the ruling class. Everywhere the light-giving globes sent their roseate radiance.

The cuirassed dwarfs led us through the aisle. Within the arc of the inner half-circle was another glittering board, an oval.

But of those seated there and facing us, I had eyes for only one—Yolara! She swayed up to greet O'Keefe, and she was like one of those white lily maids, whose beauty Hoang-Ku, the sage, says made the Gobi a paradise, and whose crimes later the burned-out desert that it is. She held out hands to Larry, and on her face was love—unashamed, unhiding.

She was Circe—but Circe conquered. Webs of filmiest white clung to the roseleaf body, like rosy morning mists about a nymph of Diana. Twisted through the cornsilk hair a threaded circlet of pale sapphires shone; but they were pale beside Yolara's eyes. O'Keefe bent, kissed her hands, something more than mere admiration flaming from him. She saw—and, laughing, drew him down beside her.

It came to me that of all, only these two, Yolara and O'Keefe, were in white—and I wondered. Then with a stiffening of nerves I ceased to wonder as there entered—Lugur! He was all in scarlet, and as he strode forward the voices were still; a silence fell—a tense, strained silence.

His gaze turned upon Yolara, rested upon O'Keefe, and instantly his face grew dreadful. There is no other word for it. Satan, losing heaven and finding an usurper on his throne in hell, could have held in his eyes no more of devilish malignity.

I had not noticed Von Hetzdorp, but now I saw him lean forward from the center of the table, near whose end I sat, touch Lugur, and whisper to him swiftly. With an appalling effort the dwarf controlled himself, took his place at the further end of the oval.

And now I noted that the figures between were the seven of that council of which the Shining One's priestess and Voice were the heads.

My gaze ran back. The end of the room was draped with the exquisitely colored, graceful curtains looped with gorgeous garlands. Between curtains and table, where sat Larry and the nine, a circular platform, perhaps ten yards in diameter, raised itself a few feet above the floor, its gleaming surface, half-covered with the luminous petals, fragrant, delicate.

On each side, below it, were low carven stools. The curtains parted and softly entered girls bearing their flutes, their harps, the curiously emotion-exciting, octaved drums. They sank into their places. They touched their instruments; a faint, languorous measure throbbed through the rosy air.

The stage was set! What was to be the play?

Now about the tables passed other dusky-haired maids, shoulders bare, their scanty kirtles looped high, pouring out the wines for the feasters. And gradually into the voices of these crept the olden recklessness, the gaiety. But Lugur sat silent, brooding; his face like that of some fallen god; and I sensed behind the prisoning bars of his calm a monstrous striving of evil, struggling to be free.

My eyes sought O'Keefe. Whatever it had been that Von Hetzdorp had said, clearly it now filled his mind—even to the exclusion of the wondrous woman beside him. His eyes were stern, cold, and now and then, as he turned them toward the German, filled with a curious speculation. Yolara watched him, frowned, gave a low order to the Hebe behind her.

The girl disappeared, entered again with a ewer that seemed cut of amber. The priestess poured from it into Larry's glass a clear liquid that shook with tiny sparkles of light. She raised the glass to her lips, handed it to him. Half-smiling, half-abstractedly, he took it, touched his own lips where hers had kissed; drained it. A

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nod from Yolara and the maid refilled his goblet.

At once there was a swift transformation in the Irishman. His abstraction vanished; the watchfulness, the sternness fled; his eyes sparkled. He looked upon Yolara with seemingly a new vision; leaned caressingly toward her; whispered. Her blue eyes flashed triumphantly; her chiming laughter rang. She raised her own glass. But within it was *not* that clear drink that filled Larry's! And again he drained his own.

He arose, face all reckless gaiety, rollicking deviltry.

"A toast!" he cried in English, "to the Shining One, and may the hell where it belongs soon claim it!"

HE HAD used their own word for their god—all else had been in his own tongue, and so, fortunately, they did not understand. But the intent of the contempt in his action they did recognize—and a dead, a fearful silence fell on them all. Lugur's eyes blazed, little sparks of crimson in their green. Yolara reached up, caught at O'Keefe. He seized the soft hand; caressed it. His gaze grew far away, somber.

"Hear you, the council, and you, Lugur! And all who are here!" Yolara cried. "Now I, the priestess of the Shining One, take, as is my right, my mate. And this is he!" She rose, pointed down upon Larry.

"Can't quite make out what you say, Yolara," he muttered thickly. "But say anything you like. I love your voice!" He laughed, glanced at Lugur, now upon his feet, forced calmness gone, volcano-seething. "Don't be such a skeleton at the feast, old dear!" cried O'Keefe. "Everybody's merry and bright here."

I turned sick with dread. Yolara's hand stole softly upon the Irishman's curls caressingly. He drew it down; kissed it.

"You know the law, Yolara." Lugur's voice was flat, deadly. "You may not mate with other than your own kind. And this man is a stranger—a barbarian—food for the Shining One!" Literally, he spat the phrase.

"No, not of our kind, Lugur. Higher!" Yolara answered serenely. "Lo, higher even than the Ancient Ones. A son of Siya and of Siyana!"

"A lie!" roared the red dwarf. "A lie."

"The Shining One revealed it to me!" said Yolara sweetly. "And if ye believe not, Lugur, go ask the Shining One if it be not truth!"

There was bitter, nameless menace in those last words, and whatever their hidden message to Lugur, it was potent. He stood, choking, face hell-shadowed. Von Hetzdorp leaned out again, whispered. The red dwarf bowed, now wholly ironically; resumed his place and his silence. And again I wondered, icy-hearted, what was the power the German had so to sway Lugur. What was it that he had said to O'Keefe? And what plots and counterplots were hatching in that unscrupulous brain?

"What says the council?" Yolara demanded, turning to them.

Only for a moment they consulted among themselves. Then the woman, whose face was a ravaged shrine of beauty, spoke.

"The will of the priestess is the will of the council!" she answered.

Defiance died from Yolara's face; she looked down at Larry tenderly. He sat, swaying, crooning. She clapped her hands, and one of the cuirassed dwarfs strode to her.

"Bid the priests come," she commanded, then turned to the silent room. "By the rites of Siya and Siyana, Yolara takes their son for her mate," she said; and again her hand stole down possessingly, serpent soft, to the drunken head of the O'Keefe.

The curtains parted widely. Through them filed, two by two, twelve hooded figures clad in flowing robes of the green one sees in forest vistas of opening buds of dawning spring. Of each pair one bore clasped to breast, a globe of that milky crystal I had seen in the sapphire shrine-room, the other a harp, small, shaped like the ancient clarsach of the Druids. And then, crystal globe alternately before and harp alternately held by youth and maid, they began to sing.

What was that song, I do not know, nor ever shall. Archaic, ancient beyond thought, it seemed, old with the ancientness of things that for uncounted ages have been but wind-driven dust. Rather was it the ancientness of the golden youth of the world, love lilts of earth younglings, with light of new-born suns drenching them. Chorals of young stars mating in space; murmurings of April gods and goddesses. A languor stole through me. The rosy lights upon the tripods began to die away, and as they faded the milky globes gleamed forth brighter, ever brighter. Yolara rose, stretched a hand to Larry.

She lifted her arms; within her hands were clasped O'Keefe's. She raised them above their two heads and slowly, slowly

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drew him with her into a circling, graceful step, tendrilings, delicate as the slow spiralings of twilight mist upon some still stream.

As they swayed the rippling arpeggios grew louder, and suddenly the slender pinnacles of moon fire bent, dipped, flowed to the floor, crept in a shining ring around those two—and began to rise, a gleaming, glimmering, enchanted barrier — rising, ever rising, hiding them!

With one swift movement Yolara unbound her circlet of pale sapphires, shook loose the waves of her silken hair. It fell, a rippling, wondrous cascade, veiling both her and O'Keefe to their girdles. And now the shining coils of moon fire had crept to their knees, was circling higher—higher.

And ever despair grew deeper in my soul!

What was that! I started to my feet, and all around me in the blackness I heard startled motion. From without came a blaring of trumpets, the sound of running men, loud murmurings. The tumult drew closer. I heard cries of "Lakla! Lakla!" Now it was at the very threshold and within it, oddly, as though—punctuating—the clamor, a deep-toned, almost abyssmal, booming sound, thunderously bass and reverberant.

Abruptly the harpings ceased; the moon fires shuddered, fell, and began to sweep back into the crystal globes. Yolara's swaying form grew rigid, every atom of it seeming to be listening with intensity so great that it was itself like clamor. She threw aside the veiling cloud of hair, and in the gleam of the last retreating spirals I saw her face glare out like some old Greek mask of tragedy.

The sweet lips that, even at their sweetest could never lose their delicate cruelty, had no sweetness now. They were drawn into a square—inhuman as that of the Medusa. In her eyes were the fires of the pit, and her hair seemed to writhe like the serpent locks of that Gorgon, whose mouth she had borrowed. All her beauty was transformed into a nameless thing. Hideous, inhuman, blasting! If this was the true soul of Yolara springing to her face, then, I thought, God help us in very deed!

I wrested my glance away to O'Keefe. All drunkenness gone, himself again, he was staring down at that hellish sight, and in his eyes were loathing and horror unutterable. So they stood—and the light fled.

Only for a moment did the darkness hold. With lightning swiftness the blackness that was the chamber's other wall vanished. Through a portal, open between gray screens, the silver sparkling light poured.

And through the portal marched, two by two, incredible, nightmare figures—frog men, giants, taller by nearly a yard than even tall O'Keefe! Their enormous saucer eyes were irised by wide bands of green-flicked red, in which the phosphorescence flickered like cold flames. Their long muzzles, lips half-open in monstrous grin, held rows of glistening, slender, lancet sharp fangs. Over the glaring eyes arose a horny helmet, a carapace of black and orange scales, studded with foot-long lance-headed horns.

They lined themselves like soldiers on each side of the wide table aisle, and now I could see that this horny armor covered shoulders and backs, ran across the chest in a knobbed cuirass, and at wrists and heels jutted out into curved, murderous spurs.

The webbed hands and feet ended in yellow, spade-shaped claws. A short kilt of the same pale amber stones that I had seen upon the apparition of the Moon Pool Chamber's wall hung about their swollen middles.

They carried spears, ten feet, at least, in length, the heads of which were pointed cones, glistening with that same covering, from whose touch of swift decay I had so narrowly saved Rador.

In all the chamber there was now no sound. Yolara's hellish face had changed no whit; nor had Larry O'Keefe's eyes left it.

And then, quietly, through the ranks of the frog men came—a girl! Behind her, enormous pouch at his throat swelling in and out menacingly, in one paw a tree-like spike-studded mace, a frog-man, huger than any of the others, guarding. But of him I caught but a fleeting, involuntary glance.

All my gaze was for the girl.

For it was she who had pointed out to us the way from the peril of the Dweller's lair on Nan-Tanach. And as I gazed at her, I marveled that ever could I have thought the priestess more beautiful. Turning, I saw Larry's own gaze leave Yolara for her. Saw him stiffen; and to his eyes rush joy incredible and an utter abasement of shame.

And from all about came murmurs—edged with anger, half-incredulous, tinged with fear.

"Lakla!"

"The handmaiden to the Silent Ones!"

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CHAPTER XI

"THESE THE SILENT ONES SUMMON!"

THROUGH the grotesque ranks of the frog-men Lakla paced, and halted close beside me. From firm little chin to dainty buskined feet she was swathed in the soft metallic robes; these of a dull, almost coppery hue. The left arm was hidden, the right free and gloved, the gloving disappearing high in the shoulder folds. Wound tight about the arm was one of the vines of the sculptured wall and of Lugur's circled signet-ring. Thick, a vivid green, its five tendrils ran between her fingers, stretching out five flowered heads that gleamed like blossoms cut from gigantic, glowing rubies.

So she stood for a moment, contemplating Yolara, from whose visage the mask had fled, leaving, it is true, a face still seared with rage and hate, but human. Drawn perhaps by my gaze, she dropped her eyes upon me; golden, translucent, with tiny flecks of amber in their aureate irises, the soul that looked through them was as far removed from the flaming out of the priestess's as zenith is above nadir.

I noted the low, broad brow, the proud little nose, the tender mouth, and the soft —sunlight—glow that seemed to transfuse the delicate skin. And suddenly in the eyes dawned a smile—sweet, friendly, a touch of roguishness, profoundly reassuring its all humanness. I felt my heart expand as though freed from fetters, a return of my confidence in the essential reality of things. As though in nightmare the struggling consciousness should glimpse some familiar face and know the terrors with which it strove were but dreams. And involuntarily I smiled back at her.

She raised her head and looked again at Yolara, contempt and a certain curiosity in her gaze; at O'Keefe—and through the softened eyes drifted swiftly a shadow of sorrow, and on its fleeting wings deepest interest, and hovering over that a naive approval as reassuringly human as had been her smile. She spoke, and her voice deep-timbered, soft gold as was Yolara's all silver, was subtly the synthesis of all the golden glowing beauty of her.

"The Silent Ones have sent me, O Yolara," she said. "And this is their command to you. That ye deliver to me to bring before them three of the four strangers who have found their way here. This man they summon"—she pointed to O'Keefe—"and this"—her hand almost touched me —"and that yellow-haired one who seeks his mate and babe"—and how knew she of Olaf's quest? I wondered. "But for him there who plots with Lugur"—she pointed at Von Hetzdorp, and I saw Yolara start—"they have no need. Into his heart the Silent Ones have looked; and Lugur and you may keep him, Yolara!"

There was honeyed venom in the last words. And let me write here that truly angelic as Lakla might look and on occasion be, great as was her heart and high her spirit, she was very human indeed. Feminine through and through, and therefore not disdainful, when they served her, either of woman's guile or woman's needle tongue.

Yolara was herself again; now only the edge of shrillness on her voice revealed her wrath as she answered the Handmaiden.

"And whence have the Silent Ones gained power to command, *choya?*"

This last, I knew, was a very vulgar word; I had heard Rador use it in a moment of anger to one of the serving maids, and it meant, approximately, "kitchen girl," "scullion." Beneath the insult and the acid disdain, the blood rushed up under Lakla's ambered ivory skin. Her hand clenched, and I thought I saw writhe the vine that braceleted her arm.

"Yolara"—her voice was calm—"of no use it is to question me. I am but the messenger of the Silent Ones. And one thing only am I bidden to ask you—do you deliver over to me the three strangers?"

Lugur was on his feet; eagerness, sardonic delight, sinister anticipation thrilling from him. And my same glance showed Von Hetzdorp, crouched, biting his fingernails, glaring at the Golden Girl.

"No!" Yolara fairly spat the word. "No! Now by Thanaroa and by the Shining One, no!" Her eyes blazed, her nostrils were wide, in her fair throat a little pulse beat angrily. "You, Lakla, take you *my* message to the Silent Ones. Say to them that I keep this man"—she pointed to Larry—"because he is mine. Say to them that I keep the yellow-haired one and him"—she pointed to me—"because it pleases me.

"Tell them that upon their mouths I place my foot, so!" She stamped upon the dais viciously. "And that in their faces I spit!" And her action was hideously snakelike. "And say last to them, you handmaiden, that if *you* they dare to send to Yolara again, she will feed *you* to the Shining One! Now—go!"

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THE handmaiden's face was white. "Not unforeseen by the three was this, Yolara," she replied. "And did you speak as you have spoken, then I was bidden to say this to you." Her voice deepened. "Three *tal* have ye to take counsel, Yolara. And at the end of that time three things must ye have determined, either to do or not to do. First, send the strangers to the Silent Ones; second, give up, ye and Lugur and all of ye, that dream ye have of conquest of the world without; and, third, forswear the Shining One!

"And if ye do not one and all these things, then are ye done, your cup of life broken, your wine of life spilled. Yea, Yolara, for ye and the Shining One, Lugur and the Nine and all those here and their kind shall pass! This say the Silent Ones, 'Surely shall all of ye pass and be as though never had ye been'!"

Now a gasp of rage and fear arose from all those around me, but the priestess threw back her head and laughed loud and long. Into the silver sweet chiming of her laughter clashed that of Lugur, and after a little the nobles took it up, till the whole chamber echoed with their mirth. O'Keefe, lips tightening, moved toward the handmaiden, and almost imperceptibly, but peremptorily, she waved him back.

"Those *are* great words. Great words indeed, *choya,*" shrilled Yolara at last; and again Lakla winced beneath the word. "Lo, for *laya* upon *laya,* the Shining One has been freed from the three; and for *laya* upon *laya* they have sat helpless, rotting. Now I ask you again—whence comes their power to lay their will upon me, and whence comes their strength to wrestle with the Shining One and the beloved of the Shining One?"

And again she laughed, and again Lugur and all the fair-haired joined in her laughter.

Into the eyes of Lakla I saw creep a doubt, a wavering; as though deep within her the foundations of her own belief were none too firm.

She hesitated, turning upon O'Keefe eyes in which rested more than suggestion of appeal! And Yolara saw, too, for she flashed with triumph, stretched a finger toward the handmaiden.

"Look!" she cried. "Look! Why, even *she* does not believe!" Her voice grew silk of silver—merciless, cruel. "Now am I minded to send another answer to the Silent Ones. Yea! But not by *you,* Lakla; by these." She pointed to the frog-men, and, swift as light, her hand darted into her bosom, bringing forth the little shining cone of death.

But before she could level it, dart the Keth upon her, the Golden Girl had released that hidden left arm and thrown over her face a fold of the metallic swathings. Swifter than Yolara, she raised the arm that held the vine, and now I knew this was no inert blossoming thing. It was alive! It writhed down her arm, and with its five rubescent flower heads thrust itself out toward the priestess—vibrating, quivering, held in leash only by the light touch of the handmaiden at its very end.

From the swelling throat pouch of the monster behind her came a succession of the reverberant boomings I had heard when the little tendrils of moon flame began to shrink back to the crystal globes. The frog-men wheeled, raised their lances, leveled them at the throng. Around the reaching ruby flowers a red mist swiftly grew.

The silver cone dropped from Yolara's rigid fingers; her eyes grew stark with horror; all her unearthly loveliness fled from her. She stood pale-lipped, face shrunken, shorn of beauty by that one gesture of Lakla's as Samson was of his strength by the first clip of Delilah's shears. The handmaiden dropped the protecting veil, and now it was she who laughed.

"It would seem, then, Yolara, that there is a thing of the Silent Ones ye fear!" she said. "Well, the kiss of the *Yekta* I promise you in return for the embrace of your Shining One."

She looked at Larry, long, searchingly, and suddenly again with all that effect of sunlight bursting into dark places, her smile shone upon him. She nodded, half gaily; looked down upon me again, the little merry light dancing in her eyes; waved her hand to me.

She spoke to the giant frog-man. He wheeled behind her as she turned, facing the priestess, club upraised, fangs glistening. His troop moved not a jot, spears held high. And Lakla began to pass, slowly—almost, I thought, tauntingly—and as she reached the portal Larry leaped from the dais.

"*Alanna*!" he cried. "You'll not be leavin' me just when I've found you!"

In his excitement he spoke in his own tongue, the velvet brogue appealing. Lakla turned, and well it was that she did, for her Gargantuan follower boomed a warnote and swept the great mace over his horned head, whirling it downward as

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the Irishman rushed forward toward him.

There was a sharp cry from the handmaiden, and he halted the club not a foot from O'Keefe's black hair.

The Irishman looked him up and down, stretched out his hand, and patted the scaled arm approvingly, as one would a dog.

"Good boy," he said; "good boy! But I wouldn't harm a hair of her sweet head for all the jewels in all the crowns the kings of Ireland ever wore. Let me by!"

The monster's enormous eyes, direct on Larry, were unblinking, but from the huge throat came a puzzled croak. He turned toward the Golden Girl as though expecting some order.

The handmaiden contemplated O'Keefe, hesitant, unquestionably longingly, irresistibly. She was like a child making up her mind whether she dared or dared not take a delectable something offered her.

"I go with you," said O'Keefe, this time in her own speech. A glimmer of a smile passed through her eyes. "Come on, Doc!" He reached out a hand to me.

But now Yolara spoke. Life and beauty had flowed back into her face, and in her purple eyes all her hosts of devils were gathered.

"Do you forget what I promised you before Siya and Siyana? Or what I promised should turn you from me! And do you think that you can leave me—me—as though I were a *choya*—like her." She pointed to Lakla. "Do you—"

"Now, listen, Yolara," Larry interrupted almost plaintively. "No promise has passed from me to you, and why would you hold me?" He passed unconsciously into English. "Be a good sport, Yolara," he urged. "You have got a very devil of a temper, you know, and so have I; and we'd be really awfully uncomfortable together. And why don't you get rid of that devilish pet of yours, and be good!"

She looked at him, puzzled. Von Hetzdorp leaned over, translated to Lugur. The red dwarf smiled maliciously, drew near the priestess. Whispered to her what was without doubt as near as he could come in the Murian to Larry's own very colloquial phrases.

Yolara stiffened, her lips writhed.

"Hear me, Lakla!" she cried, her voice vibrant with determination unshakable. "Now would I not let you take this man from me were I to dwell ten thousand *laya* in the agony of the *Yekta's* kiss. This I swear to you, by Thanaroa, by my heart, and by my strength, that should you try to take him, or should he try to go with you, then shall I slay both him and you with the *Keth*, and even though the *Yekta* you carry blast me. And may my strength wither, my heart rot in my breast, and Thanaroa forget me if I do not this thing!"

"Listen, Yolara—" began O'Keefe again.

"Be silent, you!" It was almost a shriek. And her hand again sought in her breast for the cone of death.

Lugur touched her arm, whispered again. The glint of guile shone in her eyes; she laughed softly, relaxed.

"The Silent Ones, Lakla, bade you say that they allowed me three *tal* to decide," she said suavely. "Go now in peace, Lakla, and say that Yolara has heard, and that for the three *tal* they—allow—her she will take counsel."

The handmaiden hesitated, a vague apprehension, a hint of doubt in her face.

"The Silent Ones have said it," she answered at last. "Stay you here, strangers." The long lashes drooped as her eyes met O'Keefe's and a hint of blush was in her cheeks. "Stay you here, strangers, till then. But, Yolara, see you on that heart and strength you have sworn by that they come to no harm. Else that which you have invoked will come upon you swiftly indeed. And that *I* promise you," she added.

Their eyes met, clashed, burned into each other. Black flame from Abaddon and golden flame from Paradise.

"Remember!" said Lakla, and passed through the portal. The gigantic frog-man boomed a thunderous note of command, his grotesque guards turned and, slowly, eyes menacing, followed their mistress. And last of all passed out the monster with the mace.

A CLAMOR arose from all the chamber; stilled in an instant by a motion of Yolara's hand. She stood silent, regarding O'Keefe with something other now than the blind wrath of her threat to him. Something half regretful, half beseeching. But the Irishman's control was gone.

"Yolara"—his voice shook with rage, and he threw caution to the wind—"now hear *me*. I go where I will and when I will. Here shall we stay until the time *she* named is come. And then we follow her, whether you will or not. And if any should have thought to stop us, tell them of that flame that shattered the vase," he added grimly.

The wistfulness died out of her eyes.

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"Is it so?" she answered. "Now it is in my mind that much may happen ere then. Perchance you and those others may dance with the Shining One. Or perchance one of those hidden men that I showed you may visit you. Or it may be that I myself will slay ye, and not so swiftly, Larree."

"And is that so?" he said, slipping back into English. "A promise means as much to you as it does to the head of Von Hetzdorp's country." And now, the breath of danger having blown upon him, back came his old, alert, careless, whimsical self. "Before that sweet little pet of yours"—he spoke now in her own tongue—"that you name the Shining One, dances with us, Yolara, many shall wither under that swift flame I showed you; and as for you, think whether you may not feel it, too, before you have a chance to slay. And as for those hidden ones of yours, Yolara, know you that I have *anui*"—he used the Murian for spirit, the Polynesian *ani*—"who will warn me long, long before they can don those robes that hide them."

A sparkle came into his eyes. "Lo, Yolara, even before you can command them, shall you hear the voice of my spirit, and it is this." He threw back his head, and from his throat pulsed the woe-laden, sobbing cry, raising steadily into the heart-shaking, shuddering wail that I had heard on the deck of the *Suwarna*. Louder and ever louder it wailed, died away into the soul-broken sobbing, and faltered out into silence!

Upon those listening, sensitive as they were to sound, the effect of the high-pitched keening was appalling; it was gruesome enough to me. There was startled movement, a panic rush from the tables to the portal. Even Lugur's face was gray; the priestess's eyes stark wide; in Von Hetzdorp's I saw ungrudging admiration.

"And when you hear that, Yolara," thus O'Keefe, "know that my spirit is near, and think well before you send your hidden ones, or come yourself."

No answer made the priestess to him.

She turned to the white-faced nobles.

"What Lakla has said, the council must consider, and at once," said she. "Now, friends of mine, and friends of Lugur, must all feud, all rancor, between us end." She glanced swiftly at Lugur. "The *ladala*—the common people—are stirring, and the Silent Ones threaten. Yet fear not, for are we not strong under the Shining One? And now—leave us."

She waited until the last of the fair-haired had withdrawn. Her hand dropped to the table, and she gave, evidently, a signal, for in marched a dozen or more of the green dwarfs.

"Take these two to their place," she commanded, pointing to us. "But wait—" She turned to the whispering globe, touched its control.

Its light broke, swam with the film of rushing colors.

"Rador," she spoke upon it, "the two strangers come to you. Guard them and the third named Olaf as you would your life. And—listen well, Rador—if you do not, and if they should escape you, then before you die shall you beg me for what shall seem to you *laya* upon *laya* to throw you to the Shining One!"

THE green dwarfs clustered about us. Without another look at the priestess O'Keefe marched beside me, between them, from the chamber. But glancing round, I saw pain writhe beneath frozen anger on her face. And in silence she and Lugur and the council and Von Hetzdorp watched us as we passed through the portals. And it was not until we had reached the pillared entrance that Larry spoke.

"I hated to talk like that to a woman, Doc," he said, "and a pretty woman, at that. But first she played me with a marked deck, and then not only pinched all the chips, but drew a gun on me. What the hell! She nearly had me *married* to her. I don't know what the stuff was she gave me; but, take it from me, if I had the recipe for that brew I could sell it for a thousand dollars a jolt at Forty-Second and Broadway."

By this time we were before our pavilion; and neither of us in a very amiable mood, I'm afraid. Rador was awaiting us, and, to my surprise, cold indeed was his greeting. He took us from our guard, placed a whistle to his lips, and down the paths came a score of his own men.

"Let none pass in here without authority, and let none pass out unless I accompany them," he ordered brusquely. "Summon one of the swiftest of the *coria* and have it wait in readiness," he added, as though by afterthought.

But when we had entered and the screens were drawn together his manner changed; all eagerness, he questioned us. Briefly we told him of the happenings at the feast, of Lakla's dramatic interruption, and of what had followed.

"Three *tal*," he said musingly; "three

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tal the Silent Ones have allowed—and Yolara agreed." He sank back, thoughtful.

A *tal* in Muria is the equivalent of thirty hours of earth surface time.

"*Ja!*" It was Olaf. "*Ja!* I told you the Shining Devil's mistress was all evil. *Ja!* Now I begin again that tale I started when he came." He glanced toward the preoccupied Rador. "And tell him not what I say should he ask. For I trust none here in Trolldom, save the *Jomfrau*—the White Virgin!

"After the oldster was *adsprede*"—Olaf once more used that expressive Norwegian word for the dissolving of Songar—"I knew that it was a time for cunning, craft. I said to myself, 'If they think I have no ears to hear, they will speak; and it may be I will find a way to save my Helma and Dr. Goodwin's friends, too.' *Ja*, and they did speak. When I left that place with the red devil and the German, they made many signs.

"THE red Trolde asked the German how came it he worshipped Thanaroa." I could not resist a swift glance of triumph toward O'Keefe. "And the German," rumbled Olaf, "said that all his people worshipped Thanaroa and now fought against the other nations that denied him. He said that his ruler believed his people the chosen of Thanaroa, and because the other nations had defied him, his people had taken up arms. *Ja!* And Lugur believed—for Lugur he worships Thanaroa more, much more than the Shining Devil. *Ja!*

"And then we had come to Lugur's palace. They put me in rooms, and there came to me men who rubbed and oiled me and loosened my muscles. The next day I wrestled with a great dwarf they called Valdor. He was a mighty man, and long we struggled, and at last I broke his back. And Lugur was pleased, so that I sat with him at feast and with the German, too. And again, not knowing that I understood them, they talked.

"The German had gone fast and far. No longer was there talk of his ruler, but of Lugur as head man of the Germans, and Von Hetzdorp under him. They spoke of the green light that shook life from the oldster; and Lugur said that the secret of it had been the Ancient Ones' and that the council had not too much of it. But Von Hetzdorp said that among his race were many wise men who could make more once they had studied it.

"Then he spoke of the robes that protected from the Shining Devil. Lugur told him of the priests who make them and of the earth they dig that coats them. Then said the German that his wise men would make many for themselves, in case the Shining Devil should ever grow too strong, and that Lugur and he and his nation would give the Shining Devil all the rest of the world to eat. So that Lugur and he and all the Germans should always be mighty as he was when the Shining Devil ate up those who cast themselves into it.

"And the next day I wrestled with a great dwarf named Tahola, mightier far than Valdor. Him I threw after a long, long time, and his back also I broke. Again Lugur was pleased, saying that now was I worthy to be slain by him. And again we sat at table, he and the German and I. This time they spoke of something these Trolde have which opens up a *Svaelc*—abysses into which all in its range drops up into the sky!

"What!" I exclaimed.

"I know about them," said Larry. "Wait!"

"Lugur had drunk much," went on Olaf. "He was boastful. The German pressed him to show this thing. After a while the red one went out and came back with a little golden box. He and the German went into the garden. I followed them. There was a *lille Hoj*—a mound of stones in that garden on which grew flowers and trees.

"Lugur pressed upon the box, and a spark no bigger than a sand grain leaped out and fell beside the stones. Lugur pressed again, and a blue light shot from the box and lighted on the spark. The spark that had been no bigger than a grain of sand grew and grew as the blue struck it. And then there was a sighing, a wind rush, and the stones and the flowers and the trees were not. They were *forsvinde*—vanished!

"Then Lugur, who had been laughing, grew quickly sober; for he thrust the German back, far back. And soon down into the garden came tumbling the stones and the trees, but broken and shattered, and falling as though from a great height. And Lugur said that of *this* something they had much, for its making was a secret handed down by their own forefathers and not given them by the Ancient Ones.

"They feared to use it, he said, for a spark thrice as large as that he had used would have sent all that garden falling upward and might have opened a way to the outside before—he said just this—*'before we are ready to go out into it!'*

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"The German questioned much, but Lugur sent for more drink and grew merrier and threatened him, and the German was silent through fear. Thereafter I listened when I could, and little more I learned, but that little enough. *Ja!* Lugur is hot for conquest; so Yolara and so the council. They tire of it here, and the Silent Ones make their minds not too easy, no, even though they jeer at them! And this they plan—to rule our world with their Shining Devil that Lugur says has grown strong enough to fare forth.

"Already they have tunneled upward at that place they call the Lower Waters, and that I think is under Ponape itself. There was to be their gathering-place to sweep out upon the earth. But now Von Hetzdorp has told Lugur of the passage through which we came, and Lugur and he now plan to open that.

"The *ladala* they will almost utterly destroy before they go, except the soldiers and the dream makers. They talk of 'sealing' the Silent Ones within their Crimson Sea, but—and this is point of trouble—they fear that if they do it they may pull down all this place they call Muria. Those who speak against it say—'The Silent Ones can have no power on earth, never have they had it. And it may be that we shall not do well under the sun; perhaps we may wish to return—and let the haven be open in case of our need.'

"Lugur would burn all bridges behind him; destroying all. But not so Yolara. And Von Hetzdorp would not, because he would keep what is here for Germany, and in his heart, too, he laughs at the Silent Ones and he schemes to—*smadre*—smash all these people. Yet has he played upon Lugur by promising him that his own people will cast aside their rulers and will muster to Lugur and that Lugur as a new ruler of Germany and the Shining Devil as Earth God, shall rule all the world for Thanaroa. And under his whisperings Lugur begins to forget even Thanaroa!"

The Norseman was silent for a moment; then, voice deep, trembling—"Trolldom is awake; Helvede crouches at Earth Gate whining to be loosed into a world already devil ridden! And we are but three!"

CHAPTER XII

THE COUNCIL'S DECISION

I FELT the blood drive out of my heart. But Larry's was the fighting face—of the O'Keefe's of a thousand years. Rador glanced at him, arose, stepped through the curtains; returned swiftly with the Irishman's uniform.

"Put it on," he said, brusquely; again fell back into his silence and whatever O'Keefe had been about to say was submerged in his wild and joyful whoop. He ripped from him glittering tunic and leg swathings.

"Richard is himself again!" he shouted; and each garment, as he donned it, fanned his old devil-may-care confidence to a higher flame. The last scrap of it on, he drew himself up before us.

"Bow down, ye divils!" he cried. "Bang your heads on the floor and do homage to Larry the First, Emperor of Great Britain, Autocrat of all Ireland, Scotland, England, and Wales, and adjacent waters and islands! Kneel, ye scuts, kneel."

"Larry," I cried, "are you going crazy!"

"Not a bit of it," he said. "I'm that and more if Herr Von Hetzdorp keeps his promise. Whoop! Bring forth the royal jewels an' put a whole new bunch of golden strings in Tara's harp an' down with the Sassenach forever! Whoop!"

He did a wild jig.

"Lord how good the old togs feel," he grinned. "The touch of 'em has gone to my head. But it's straight stuff I'm telling you about my empire."

He laughed again; then sobered.

"Not that it's not serious enough at that. A lot that Olaf's told us I've surmised from hints dropped by Yolara. But I got the full key to it from the von himself when he stopped me just before—before"—he reddened—"well, before I acquired that brand-new brand of souse. Do you remember, Goodwin, away back in the Moon Pool Chamber that the German made a very curious remark about being certain that I always spoke what was in my mind, and that he'd remember it?

"Funny, funny psychology—the German. He made a picture of me in his mind. A somewhat innocent, frank, truthful, and impulsive Larry O'Keefe; always saying right out just what I thought and with no subterfuge or guile about me. That's the picture he carried in his neat German mind—and by the shade of Genseric the Vandal, let me be any different from it, if I dared!

"Maybe he had a hint—maybe he just surmised—that I knew a lot more than I did. And he thought Yolara and I were going to be loving little turtle doves. Also he figured that Yolara had a lot more influence with the Unholy Fireworks than Lugur. Also she could be more easily han-

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dled. All this being so, what was the logical thing for him to do? Sure, you get me, fella! Throw down Lugur and make an alliance with me! So *he* calmly offered to ditch the red dwarf if *I* would deliver Yolara. My reward was to be said emperorship! Can you beat it? Good Lord!"

He went off into a perfect storm of laughter. But not to me did this thing seem at all absurd; rather in it I sensed the dawn of catastrophe colossal.

"But how would they get to Germany—how carry the Shining One—"

"Oh, that's all worked out," answered Larry, airily. "There's a German warship hiding down there in the Carolines somewhere. The von knows where it is. Also he has a nice little wireless rigged up on one of the Nan-Matal islets. With that boat equipped with the *Keth*— He confided to me that they had apparatus that could sweep it over a fifty-mile range, and a few of those gravity-destroying bombs Olaf described—"

"Gravity-destroying bombs!" I gasped.

"Sure! The little fairy that sent the trees and stones kiting up—Von Hetzdorp licked his lips over *them*. What they do is to cut off gravity, just about as the shadow screens cut off light. And consequently whatever's in their range just naturally goes shooting up toward the moon." He sobered. "I admit I'm a bit scared about them, Doc! Anyway with those two things and—oh, yes, gentle, invisible soldiers walking around assassinating all the leaders of the rest of the world—well, *bingo* for all the rest of our world, Goodwin!

"And take it from me old chap, it's not a dream. We've got to beat Von Hetzdorp and all the rest of 'em to it, Goodwin," he ended, solemnly enough.

"But the Shining One?" I began.

"Yolara's to nurse the sweet little thing," he said. "It'll follow her like a lamb, Von Hetzdorp says. And there's something about that I don't understand."

"Something? I don't understand a bit of it," I interrupted, almost testily.

"No," he grinned. "I don't mean what it is. I mean how it's controlled. Oh, well, I'll bet Lakla knows all about it. And I'll bet we'll soon be hearing her tell us."

FOR once Larry's courage, his unquenchable confidence, found no echo within me. Not lightly, as he, did I hold that dread mystery the Dweller. And a vision passed before me, a vision of an Apocalypse undreamed by the Evangelist.

A vision of the Shining One swirling into our world, a monstrous, glorious flaming pillar of incarnate, eternal Evil. Of peoples passing through its radiant embrace into that hideous, unearthly life-in-death which I had seen enfold the sacrifices. Of armies trembling into dancing atoms of diamond dust beneath the green ray's rhythmic death. Of cities rushing out into space upon the wings of that other demoniac force which Olaf had watched at work. Of a haunted world through which the assassins of the Dweller's court stole invisible, carrying with them the very passion of hell. Of the rallying to the Thing of every sinister soul and of the weak and the unbalanced, mystics and carnivores of humanity alike; for well I knew that, once loosed, not even Germany could hold this devil-god for long, and that swiftly its blight would begin to spread!

And then a world that was all colossal reek of cruelty and terror; a welter of lusts, of hatreds and of torment; a chaos of horror in which the Dweller waxing ever stronger, the ghastly hordes of those it had consumed growing ever greater, wreaked its inhuman will!

At the last a ruined planet, a cosmic plague, spinning through the shuddering heavens; its verdant plains, its murmuring forests, its meadows and its mountains manned only by a countless crew of soulless, mindless dead-alive, their shells illumined with the Dweller's infernal glory. And flaming over this vampirized world like a flare from some hell far, infinitely far, beyond the reach of man's farthest flung imagining—the Dweller!

Panic gripped my throat, strangled me. My science could not help. What god or gods could? Olaf had turned to ancient Thor and Odin. O'Keefe's faith was in banshees!

Rador jumped to his feet; smiled amiably at us, walked to the whispering globe. He bent over its base; did something with its mechanism; beckoned to us. The globe swam rapidly, faster than ever I had seen it before. A low humming arose, changed into a murmur and then from it I heard Lugur's voice clearly.

"It's to be war, then?"

There was a chorus of assent—from a council I thought.

"I will take the tall one named Larree." It was the priestess's voice. "After the three *tal*, you may have him, Lugur, to do with as you will."

"No!" It was Lugur's voice again, but

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with a rasp of anger. "All three must die."

"He shall die," again Yolara. "But I would that first he should see Lakla die, and that she know what is to happen to him."

"No!" I started—for this was Von Hetzdorp. "Now is no time, Yolara, for one's own desires. This is my council. At the end of the three *tal* Lakla will come for our answer. Your men will be in ambush and they will slay her and her escort quickly with the *Keth*. But not till that is done must the three be slain, and then quickly. With Lakla dead we shall go forth to the Silent Ones—and I promise you that I will find the way to destroy them!"

"It is well!" It was Lugur.

"It *is* well, Yolara." It was a woman's voice, and I knew it for that old one of ravaged beauty. "Cast from your mind whatever is in it for this stranger, either of love of hatred. In this the council is with Lugur and the man of wisdom."

There was a silence. Then came the priestess's voice, sullen but—beaten.

"It is well!"

"Let the three be taken now by Rador to the temple and given to the High Priest Sator." Thus Lugur. "Until what we have planned comes to pass."

Rador gripped the base of the globe; abruptly it ceased its spinning. He turned to us as though to speak and even as he did so its bell note sounded peremptorily and on it the color films began to creep at their accustomed pace.

"I hear," the green dwarf whispered. But now we could no longer distinguish the words. He listened.

"They shall be taken there at once," he said, at last, gravely. The globe grew silent.

He stepped toward us. Larry had drawn his automatic; Olaf and I followed his example. We faced the green dwarf defiantly.

"You have heard," he said, smiling faintly.

"Not on your life, Rador," said Larry. "Nothing doing!" And then in the Murian's own tongue, "We follow Lakla, Rador. And *you* lead the way." He thrust the pistol close to the green dwarf's side.

Rador did not move. But his eyes gleamed their approval as they looked up into the Irishman's determined ones.

"Of what use, Larree?" he said, quietly. "Me you can slay, but in the end you will be taken. Life is not held so dear in Muria that my men out there or those others who can come quickly will let you by, even though you slay many. And in the end they will overpower you."

There was a trace of irresolution in O'Keefe's face.

"And," said Rador, "if I let you go, I dance with the Shining One—or worse!"

O'Keefe's pistol hand dropped.

"You're a good sport Rador, and far be it from me to get you in bad," he said. "Take us to the temple. When we get there—well, your responsibility ends, doesn't it?"

The green dwarf nodded; on his face a curious expression. Was it relief? Or was it profound emotion higher than this?

Whatever it was he turned curtly.

"Follow," he said. We passed out of that gay little pavilion that had come to be home to us even in this alien place. The guards stood at attention.

"You, Sattoya, stand by the globe," he ordered one of them. "Should the *Afyo Maie* ask, say that I am on my way with the strangers even as she has commanded."

We passed through the lines to the *corial* standing like a great shell at the end of the runway leading into the green road.

"Wait you here," he said curtly to the driver. The green dwarf ascended to his seat, sought the lever and we swept on—on and out upon the glistening obsidian.

Then Rador turned and laughed.

"Larree," he cried, "I love you for that spirit of yours! And did you think that Rador would carry to the temple prison a man who would take the chances of death upon his own shoulders to save him? Or you, Goodwin, who saved him from the rotting death? For what did I take the *corial* or lift the veil of silence that I might hear what threatened you—"

Laughing again into our amazed faces he swept the *corial* to the left, away from the temple approach.

"I am done with Lugur and with Yolara and the Shining One!" cried Rador. "My hand is for you three and for Lakla and those to whom she is handmaiden!"

The shell leaped forward; seemed to fly.

"Whence go we, Rador?" I gasped in his ear.

"Straight to that bridge that guards the way to the Crimson Sea," he shouted, "and pray whatever gods you worship that we pass it before ever Yolara finds whence our way has led!"

NOW we were flying down toward that last span whose ancientness had set it apart from all the other soaring arches. The shell's speed slackened; we approached warily.

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"We pass there?" asked O'Keefe.

The green dwarf nodded, pointing to the right where the bridge ended in a broad platform held high upon two gigantic piers, between which ran a spur from the glistening road. Platform and bridge were swarming with men-at-arms; they crowded the parapets, looking down upon us curiously but with no evidence of hostility. Rador drew a deep breath of relief.

"We don't have to break our way through, then?" There was disappointment in the Irishman's voice.

"No use, Larree!" Smiling, Rador stopped the *corial* just beneath the arch and beside one of the piers. "Now listen well. They have had no warning, hence does Yolara still think us on the way to the temple. This is the gateway of the Portal, and the gateway is closed by the Shadow. Once I commanded here and I know its laws. This must I do—by craft persuade Serku, the keeper of the gateway, to lift the Shadow; or raise it myself. And that will be hard and it may well be that in the struggle life will be stripped of us all. Yet is it better to die fighting than to dance with the Shining One!"

"Ja!" It was Olaf, eyes again ice glinting as he clutched one of Rador's broad shoulders. *"Ja!* Well, it is to die fighting—but I would slay Lugur before I die!"

"And so you may, strong one," laughed the green dwarf. "For here Lugur will surely come when the alarm is given, and they will try to save us for a slower death. And now, see to those flame tubes of yours. And follow my lead, for too long have we waited here."

He swept the shell around the pier. Opened a wide plaza paved with the volcanic glass, but black as that down which we had sped from the Chamber of the Moon Pool. It shone like a mirrored lakelet of jet. On each side of it arose what at first glance seemed towering bulwarks of the same ebon obsidian; at second revealed themselves as structures hewn and placed by men. Polished facades pierced by dozens of high, narrow windows each ovaled with exquisite intaglios of feathered serpent and the flower snake that Lakla had called the *Yekta* and with whose kiss she had threatened Yolara.

Down each facade a stairway fell, broken by small landings on which a door opened. They dropped to a broad ledge of grayish stone edging the lip of this midnight pool and upon it also fell two wide flights from either side of the bridge platform. Along all four stairways the guards were ranged. And here and there against the ledge stood the shells, in a curiously comforting resemblance to parked motors in our own world.

The somber walls bulked high; curved and ended in two obelisked pillars. From these, like a tremendous curtain stretched a barrier of that tenebrous gloom which, though weightless as shadow itself, I now knew to be as impenetrable as the veil between life and death. In this murk, unlike all others I had seen, I sensed movement. A quivering, a tremor constant and rhythmic; not to be seen yet caught by some subtle sense; as though through it beat a swift pulse of—black light.

In the center of the pit of glittering darkness, poised over the depths that were like some frozen spring upwelling from inky Styx itself, we hung for a moment watching.

The green dwarf turned the *corial* slowly to the edge at the right; crept cautiously on toward where, not more than a hundred feet from the barrier, a low, wide entrance opened in the fort. Guarding its threshold stood two guards, armed with broadswords, double handed, terminating in a wide lunette mouthed with murderous fangs. These they raised in salute and through the portal strode a dwarf huge as Rador, dressed as he and carrying only the poniard that was the badge of office of Muria's captainry.

"Ho, Rador!" he hailed, merrily. "Why hover without when within are cheer and welcome?"

The green dwarf swept the shell expertly against the ledge; leaped out.

"Greeting, Serku!" he answered. "I was but looking for the *coria* of Lakla."

"Lakla!" exclaimed Serku. "Why, the handmaiden passed with her *Akka* nigh a *va* ago!"

"Passed!" The astonishment of the green dwarf was so real that half was I myself deceived. "You let her pass?"

"Certainly I let her pass." But under the green dwarf's stern gaze the truculence of the guardian faded. "Why should I not?" he asked, apprehensively.

"Because Yolara commanded otherwise," answered Rador, coldly.

"There came no command to me." Little beads of sweat stood out on Serku's forehead. "Else would I surely have obeyed—"

"Serku," interrupted the green dwarf swiftly, "truly is my heart wrung for you. This is a matter of Yolara and of Lugur and the council; yes, even of the Shining One! And the message was sent, and the

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fate, mayhap, of all Muria rested upon your obedience and the return of Lakla with these strangers to the council. Now truly is my heart wrung, for there are few I would less like to see dance with the Shining One than you, Serku," he ended, softly.

LIVID now was the gateway's guardian, his great frame shaking.

"Come with me and speak to Yolara," he pleaded. "There came no message. Tell her—"

"Wait, Serku!" There was a thrill as of inspiration in Rador's voice. "This *corial* is of the swiftest—Lakla's of the slowest. With Lakla scarce a *va* ahead we can reach her before she enters the Portal. Lift you the Shadow. We shall bring her back and this will I do for you, Serku."

Doubt tempered Serku's panic.

"Why not go alone, Rador, leaving the strangers here with me?" he asked, and I thought not unreasonably.

"Nay then." The green dwarf was brusque. "Lakla will not return unless I carry to her these men as evidence of our good faith. There is strife brewing, Serku, battle between Muria and the Silent Ones. Nor have I time to explain more with Lakla now a *va* away. Come, we will speak to Yolara and she shall judge you." He started away, but Serku caught his arm.

"No, Rador, no!" he whispered, again panic-stricken. "Go you, as you will. But bring her back! Speed Rador!" He sprang toward the entrance. "I lift the Shadow—"

Into the green dwarf's poise crept a curious, almost a listening, alertness. He leaped to Serku's side.

"I go with you," I heard. "Some little I can tell you." They were gone.

"Fine work!" muttered Larry. "Nominated for a citizen of Ireland when we get out of this, one Rador of—"

The Shadow trembled, shuddered into nothingness. The obelisked outposts that had held it framed a ribbon of roadway, high banked with verdure, vanished in green distances.

And then from the portal sped a shriek, a death cry! It cut through the silence of the ebon pit like a whimpering arrow. Before it had died down the stairways came pouring the guards. Those at the threshold raised their swords and peered within. Abruptly Rador was between them. One dropped his hilt and gripped him. The green dwarf's poniard flashed and was buried in his throat. Down upon Rador's head swept the second blade.

A flame leaped from O'Keefe's hand and the sword seemed to fling itself from its wielder's grasp—another flash and the soldier crumpled. Rador threw himself into the shell, darted to the high seat, and straight between the pillars of the Shadow we flew!

There came a crackling, a shadow as of vast wings flinging down upon us. The *corial's* flight was checked as by a giant's hand. I was hurled forward into Olaf and O'Keefe, tumbled beneath the front whorl. The shell swerved sickeningly; there was an oddly metallic splintering; it quivered; shot ahead. Dizzily I picked myself up and looked behind.

The Shadow had fallen—but too late, a bare instant too late. And shrinking as we fled from it, still it seemed to strain like some fettered Afrit from Eblis, throbbing with wrath, seeking with every malign power it possessed to break its bonds and pursue. Not until long after were we to know that it had been the dying hand of Serku, groping out of oblivion, that had cast it after us as a fowler upon an escaping bird.

"Snappy work, Rador!" It was Larry speaking. "But they cut the end off your bus all right!"

I glanced back, a full quarter of the hindward whorl was gone, sliced off cleanly. Rador noted it with anxious eyes.

"That is bad," he said, "but not too bad, perhaps. We cannot tell yet. All depends upon how closely Lugur and his men can follow us."

He raised a hand to O'Keefe in salute.

"But to you, Larree, I owe my life. Not even the *Keth* could have been as swift to save me as was that death flame of yours, friend!"

The Irishman waved an airy hand, relapsing into his own tongue.

"You're doing your bit yourself, old thing," he remarked; Rador caught the meaning. "Fluke," Larry murmured to me. "Aimed at the beggar's head and went high. Reputation maker—the shot you never meant. What happened?" He turned again to Rador.

"Serku"—the green dwarf drew from his girdle the blood-stained poniard—"Serku I was forced to slay. Even as he raised the Shadow the globe gave the alarm. Lugur follows with twice ten times ten of his best. Serku drew his blade upon me, and I killed—" He hesitated. "Though we have escaped the Shadow it has taken toll of our swiftness. May we reach the Portal before it closes upon Lakla. But if we do

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not—" He paused again. "Well I know a way. But it is not one I am gay to follow. *No!*"

He snapped open the aperture that held the ball flaming within the dark crystal; peered at it anxiously I crept to the torn end of the *corial*. How, I wondered, could the Shadow have first held, when shorn with such unbelievable energy. The edges were crumbling, disintegrated. They powdered in my fingers like dust. Mystified still, I crept back where Larry, sheer happiness pouring from him, was whistling softly and polishing up his automatic His gaze fell upon Olaf's grim, sad face and softened.

"Buck up, Olaf!" he said. "We've got a good fighting chance. Once we link up with Lakla and her crowd I'm betting that we get your wife. Never doubt it! The baby—" he hesitated awkwardly. The Norseman's eyes filled; he stretched a hand to the O'Keefe.

"The *yndling*—she is of *de Dode*," he half whispered, "of the blessed dead. For her I have no fear and for her vengeance will be given me. *Ja!* But *mine Hustru*, my Helma—she is of the dead-alive—like those we saw whirling like leaves in the light of the Shining Devil. And I would that she, too, were of *de Dode*, and at rest. I do not know how to fight the Shining Devil—no!"

His heart's bitter despair welled up in his voice.

The road had begun to thrust itself through high flung, sharply pinnacled masses and rounded out-croppings of rock on which clung patches of the amber moss.

The trees had utterly vanished, and studding the moss-carpeted plains were only clumps of a willowy shrub from which hung, like grapes, clusters of white waxen blooms. The light, too, had changed; gone were the dancing, sparkling atoms and the silver had faded to a soft, almost ashen grayness. Ahead of us marched a rampart of coppery cliffs, rising like all these mountainous walls we had seen, into the immensities of haze.

Something long drifting in my subconsciousness turned to startled realization. The speed of the shell was slackening! The aperture containing the ionizing mechanism was still open; I glanced within. The whirling ball of fire was not dimmed, but its coruscations, instead of pouring down through the cylinder, swirled and eddied and shot back as though trying to re-enter their source. Rador nodded grimly.

"The Shadow takes its toll," he said. We topped a rise. Larry gripped my arm.

"Look!" he cried, and pointed. Far, far behind us, so far that the road was but a glistening thread, a score of shining points came speeding.

"Lugur and his men," said Rador.

"Can't you step on her?" asked Larry.

"Step on her?" repeated the green dwarf, puzzled.

"Give her more speed; push her," explained O'Keefe.

Rador looked about him. The coppery ramparts were close, not more than five of our miles distant; in front of us the plain lifted in a long rolling swell, and up this the *corial* essayed to go with a terrifying lessening of speed. Faintly behind us came shoutings, and we knew that Lugur drew close. Nor anywhere was there sign of Lakla nor her frog-men—the *Akka*.

NOW we were half-way to the crest; the shell barely crawled and from beneath it came a faint hissing. It quivered and I knew that its base was no longer held above the glassy surface, but rested on it.

"One last chance!" exclaimed Rador. He pressed upon the control lever and wrenched it from its socket. Instantly the sparkling ball expanded, whirling with prodigious rapidity and sending a cascade of coruscations into the cylinder. The shell rose; leaped through the air; the dark crystal split into fragments; the fiery ball dulled; died. But upon the impetus of that last thrust we reached the crest. Poised there for a moment I caught a glimpse of the road dropping down the side of an enormous moss-covered bowl-shaped valley whose sharply curved sides ended abruptly at the base of the towering barrier.

Then down the steep, hissing over the obsidian, powerless to guide or to check the shell we plunged in a metor rush straight for the annihilating adamantine breasts of the cliffs!

Now the quick thinking of Larry's air training came to our aid. As the rampart reared close to us he threw himself upon Rador; hurled him and himself against the side of the flying whorl. Under the shock the finely balanced machine, almost floating in air through its projectile speed, swerved from its course. It struck the soft, low bank of the road, shot high in air, bounded on through the thick carpeting, whirled like a dervish and fell upon its side. Shot from it, we rolled for yards but the moss saved broken bones or serious bruises.

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"Quick!" cried the green dwarf. He seized an arm, dragged me to my feet, began running to the cliff base not a hundred feet away. Beside us raced O'Keefe and Olaf. At our left was the black road. It stopped abruptly, was cut off by a slab of polished crimson stone a hundred feet high, and as wide, set within the coppery face of the barrier. On each side of it stood pillars, cut from the living rock and immense, almost, as those which held the rainbow veil of the Dweller. Across its face weaved unnameable carvings, but I had no time for more than a glance. The green dwarf gripped my arm again.

"Quick!" he cried again. "The handmaiden has passed!"

At the right of the Portal ran a low wall of shattered rock. Over this we raced like rabbits. Hidden behind it was a narrow path. Crouching, Rador in the lead, we sped along it; three hundred, four hundred yards we raced—and the path ended in a *cul de sac!* To our ears was borne a louder shouting. O'Keefe peered over the wall.

"Here they come," he announced.

The first of the pursuing shells had swept over the lip of the great bowl, poised for a moment as we had and then, and *not* as we had, began a cautious descent. Within it, scanning the slopes, I saw Lugur.

"A little closer and I'll get him!" whispered Larry viciously. He raised his pistol.

His hand was caught in a mighty grip; Rador, eyes blazing, stood beside him.

"No!" rasped the green dwarf. He heaved a shoulder against one of the boulders that formed the pocket. It rocked aside, revealing a slit of an entrance.

"In!" ordered he, straining against the weight of the stone. O'Keefe, weapon in hand, slipped through, Olaf at his back, I following. With a lightning leap the green dwarf was beside me, the huge rock missing him by a hairbreadth as it swung into place!

We were in Cimmerian darkness. I felt for my pocket-flash and recalled with distress that I had left it behind with my medicine kit when we fled from the gardens. But Rador seemed to need no light.

"Grip hands!" he ordered. A palm shot into mine.

"It's me, professor," laughed O'Keefe. A great paw touched my side, fell into my other hand, and I knew this for Olaf's. We crept, single file, holding to each other like children, through the black. At last the green dwarf paused.

"Await me here," he whispered. "Do not move. And for your lives—be silent!" And he was gone.

CHAPTER XIII

DRAGON WORM AND MOSS DEATH

FOR a small eternity—to me at least—we waited. Then as silent as ever the green dwarf returned.

"It is well," he said, some of the strain gone from his voice. "Grip hands again, and follow."

"Wait a bit, Rador." This was Larry. "If Lugur's going to follow us in here, why not let Olaf and me go back to the opening and pick them off as they come in? We could hold the lot, and in the meantime you and Goodwin could go after Lakla for help."

"Lugur knows the secret of the Portal, if he dares use it," answered the captain, with a curious indirection. "And now that they have challenged the Silent Ones I think he *will* dare. Also he will find our tracks, and it may be that he knows this hidden way."

"Well, for Heaven's sake!" O'Keefe's appalled bewilderment was almost ludicrous. "If he knows all that, and you knew all that, why didn't you let me click him when I had the chance?"

"Larree," the green dwarf was grave and oddly humble. "It seemed good to me, too—at first. And then I heard a command, heard it clearly, to stop you—that Lugur die not now, lest a greater vengeance fail!"

"Command? From whom?" The Irishman's voice distilled out of the blackness the very essence of bewilderment.

"I thought," Rador was whispering, "that it came from the Silent Ones!"

"Superstition!" groaned O'Keefe in utter exasperation. "Always superstition! What can you do against it!

"Sh!" Rador was warning; he began whispering. "Lugur for a little time will be perplexed. He will not open the Portal until he must. They will find the *corial* and search. They will follow our tracks. Beyond the moving stone is naught but bare rock; there will be no tracks there but neither will there be hiding place. They will seek the entrance and they will find it. Then Lugur will send after us there a force of his men and with his others will pass through the Portal to beat for us.

"For half a *va* we go along a way of death. From its peril we pass into another against whose dangers I can guard you.

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But in parts this is in view of the roadway and it may be that Lugur will see us. If so we must fight as best we can. If we pass these two roads safely, then is the way to the Crimson Sea clear nor need we fear Lugur nor any. And there is another thing that Lugur does not know. When he opens the Portal the Silent Ones will hear and Lakla and the *Akka* will be swift to greet its opener.

"Rador," I asked, "how know you all this?"

"The handmaiden is my own sister's child," he answered, quietly.

O'Keefe drew a long breath.

"Uncle," he remarked casually in English, "meet the man who's going to be your nephew!" And thereafter, except in grave moments he never addressed the green dwarf except by the avuncular title, which Rador, humorously enough, apparently conceived to be one of respectful endearment.

For me a light broke. Plain now was the reason for his fore-knowledge of Lakla's appearance at the feast where Larry had so narrowly escaped Yolara's spells. Plain indeed the determining factor that had cast his lot with ours, and my confidence despite his discourse of mysterious perils, experienced a remarkable quickening.

Speculation as to the marked differences in pigmentation and appearance of niece and uncle was dissipated by my consciousness that we were now moving in a dim half light.

We were in a fairly wide tunnel. Not far ahead the gleam filtered, pale yellow like sunlight sifting through the leaves of autumn poplars. And as we drew closer to its source I saw that it did indeed pass through a leafy screen hanging over the passage end. This Rador drew aside cautiously, beckoned us and we stepped through.

At first thought it appeared as a tunnel cut through soft green mold. Its base was a flat strip of pathway a yard wide from which the walls curved out in perfect cylindrical form, smoothed and evened with utmost nicety. Thirty feet wide they were at their widest, then drew toward each other with no break in their symmetry; they did not close. Above was, roughly, a ten-foot rift, ragged edged, through which poured light like that in the heart of pale amber, a buttercup light shot through with curiously evanescent bronze shadows.

Under the feet the path gave with a resiliency like hard rubber or well-rolled turf.

It was ridged—rippled—these ripples a foot apart and flanked by deep, sharp indentations, clean cut as though drilled. Just such a tunnel, it came to me, as would be made by a huge metal ball belted with a long, toothed strip and sent rolling with terrific force through some compressible material such as, for instance, some types of moss.

"Quick!" commanded Rador, uneasily, and set off at a sharp pace.

MOSS. Why had that image come to me? Ah, so that was why! For now, my eyes becoming more accustomed to the strange light, I saw that the tunnel's walls *were* of moss.

"Hurry!" It was Rador calling. I had lagged behind and reluctantly I turned my mind from those tempting walls, luring me to stop and study them; whose spell, indeed, already had slowed my pace. Hurriedly I rejoined the others; resolutely I kept my eyes at my feet, maintaining my place in the file.

And down the corridor swept ever tiny gusts, overladen with unfamiliar, oddly fragrant odors; some so pronounced as to produce a trifle of light-headedness. Almost as though surcharged with oxygen.

Rador quickened the pace to a half-run; we were climbing; panting. The tunnel was no longer straight; it was—sinuous. Dispossessing the picture of the rolling ball came another of a long, flexible cylinder being forced through the luxuriant growth. The amber light grew stronger; the rift above us wider. The tunnel curved; on the left a narrow cleft appeared. The green dwarf leaped toward it, thrust us within, pushed us ahead of him up a steep rocky fissure—well nigh, indeed, a chimney. Up and up this we scrambled until my lungs were bursting and I thought I could climb no more. The crevice ended; we crawled out and sank, even Rador, upon a little, leaf-carpeted clearing circled by lacy tree-ferns.

Gasping, legs aching, we lay prone, relaxed, drawing back strength and breath. Rador was first to rise. Thrice he bent low as in homage, then—

"Give thanks to the Ancient Ones, for their power has been over us!" he exclaimed.

Dimly I wondered what he meant. Something about the fern leaf at which I had been staring aroused me. I leaped to my feet and ran to its base. This was no

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fern, no! It was fern moss! The largest of its species I had ever found in tropic jungles had not been more than two inches high, and this was—twenty feet! The scientific fire I had experienced in the tunnel returned uncontrollable. I parted the fronds, gazed out, froze with sheer wonder.

My outlook commanded a vista of miles—and that vista! A Fata Morgana of plantdom! A Scheherazade's garden of enchantment! A land of flowered sorcery!

Forests of tree-high mosses spangled over with blooms of every conceivable shape and color. Cataracts and clusters, avalanches and nets of blossoms in pastels, in dulled metallics, in gorgeous flamboyant hues. Some of them phosphorescent and shining like living jewels; some sparkling as though with dust of opals, of sapphires, of rubies and topazes and emeralds. Thickets of convolvuli like the trumpets of the seven arch-angels of Mara, king of illusion, which are shaped from the bows of splendors arching his highest heaven!

And moss veils like banners of a marching host of Titans; pennons and bannerets of the sunset; gonfalons of the jinn; webs of faery; oriflammes of elfland!

Springing up through that polychromatic flood of myriads of pedicles—slender and straight as spears, or soaring in spirals, or curving with undulations gracile as the white serpents of Tanit in ancient Carthaginian groves. And all surmounted by a fantasie of spore cases in shapes of minaret and turret, domes and spires and cones, caps of Phrygia and bishops' miters, shapes grotesque and unnameable. Shapes that were delicate and lovely!

As I gazed, breath strangled with awe, a sound began to come to us, reaching out like the first faint susurrus of the incoming tide; sighing, sighing, growing stronger. Now its mournful whispering quivered all about us, shook us. Then passing like a Presence, it died away in far distances.

"The Portal!" said Rador. "Lugur has entered!"

He, too, parted the fronds and peered back along our path.

And then—

"Holy St. Brigid!" gasped Larry.

From the rift in the tunnel's continuation, nigh a mile beyond the cleft through which we had fled, lifted a crown of horns—of tentacles—erect, alert, of mottled gold and crimson. It lifted higher, and from a monstrous scarlet head beneath them blazed two enormous opaque eyes, their depths wells of purplish phosphorescence. Higher still—noiseless, earless, chinless; a livid, worm mouth from which a slender scarlet tongue leaped like playing flames!

Slowly it rose, its mighty neck cuirassed with gold and scarlet scales from whose polished surfaces the amber light glinted like flakes of fire. And under this neck shimmered something like a palely luminous silvery shield, guarding it. More and more it drew into sight as the head of horror mounted. And in the shield's center, full ten feet across, glowing, flickering, pulsating, shining out coldly, was a rose of white flame. A "flower of cold fire" even as Rador had said.

NOW swiftly the Thing upreared, standing like a scaled tower a hundred feet above the rift, its eyes scanning that movement I had seen along the course of its lair. There was a hissing; the crown of horns fell, whipped and writhed like the tentacles of an octopus; the towering length dropped back.

"Quick!" gasped Rador and through the fern moss, along the path and down the other side of the steep we raced.

Behind us for an instant there was a rushing as of a torrent; a far-away, faint, agonized screaming—silence!

"No fear *now* from those who followed," whispered the green dwarf, pausing.

"Sainted St. Patrick!" O'Keefe gazed ruminatively at his automatic. "An' he expected me to kill *that* with *this*. Well, as Fergus O'Connor said when they sent him out to slaughter a wild bull with a potato knife: 'Ye'll niver rayilize how I appreciate the confidence ye show in me!"

"The dragon worm!" Rador said.

"It was *Helvede Orm*—the hell worm!" groaned Olaf.

"There you go again—" blazed Larry. But the green dwarf was hurrying down the path and swiftly we followed.

The scene in front of us was oddly weird and depressing; in some indefinable way—dreadful.

The curious mossy fringes were like distorted images of dog and deerlike forms, of birds—of *dwarfs* and here and there the simulacra of the giant frogs! Spore cases, yellowish green, as large as miters and much resembling them in shape, protruded from the heaps. My repulsion grew.

Rador turned to us a face whiter far than that with which he had looked upon the dragon worm.

"Now for your lives," he whispered, "tread softly here as I do, and speak not."

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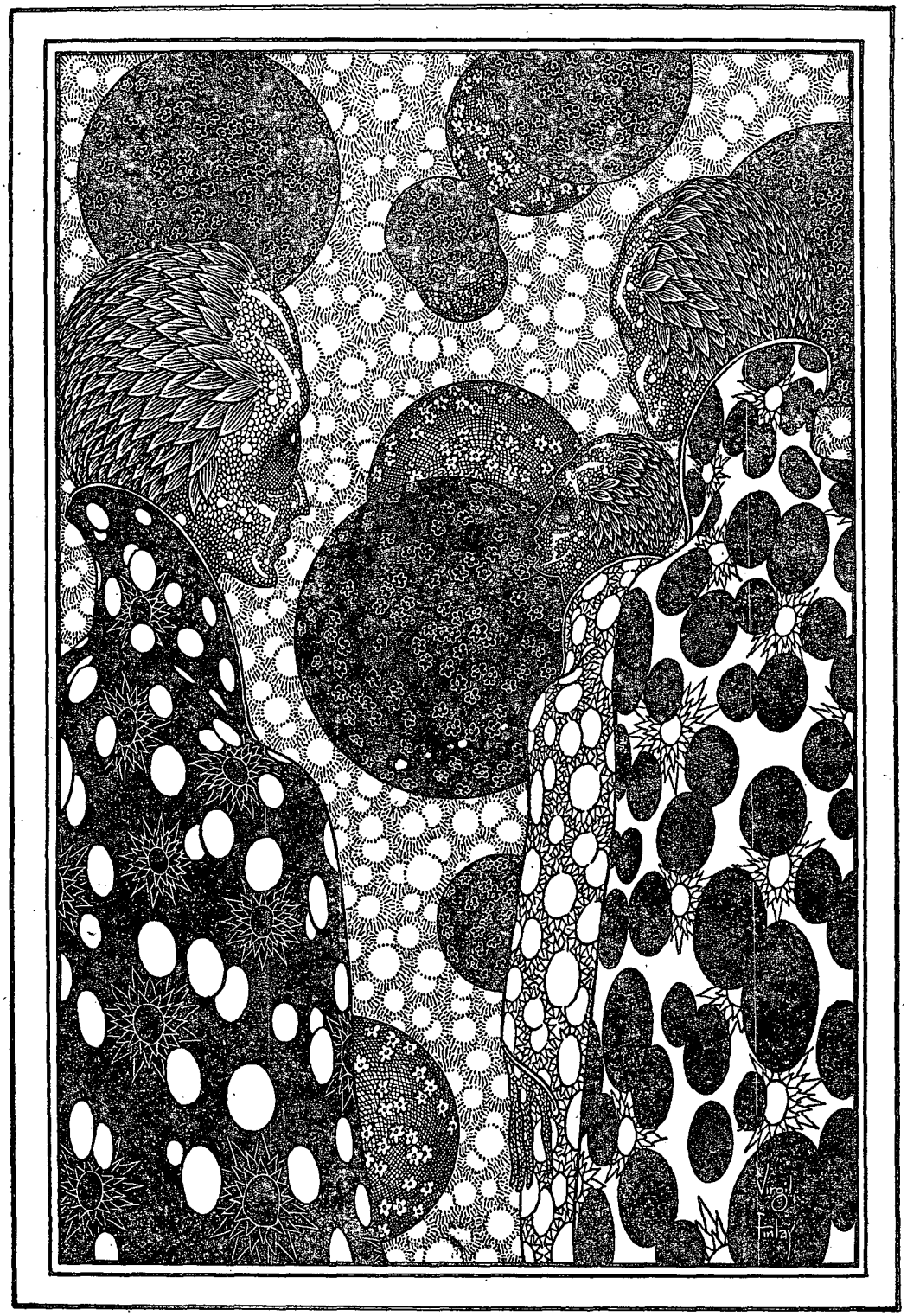

"We have looked upon the strange blossoming orbs that circle the sun ye call Arcturus. . . . "

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He stepped forward on tiptoe, slowly, with utmost caution. We crept after him; passed the heaps beside the path. And as I passed my skin crept and I shrank and saw the others shrink, too, with that unnameable loathing. Nor did the green dwarf pause until he had reached the brow of a small hillock a hundred yards beyond. And *he* was trembling.

"Now what the devil are we up against?" muttered O'Keefe.

The green dwarf stretched a hand; stiffened; gazed over to the left of us beyond a lower hillock upon whose broad crest lay a pile of the moss shapes. They fringed it, their miters having a grotesque appearance of watching what lay below. And now I saw that the glistening road lay below—and from it came a shout! A dozen of the *coria* were there, filled with Lugur's men and in one of them Lugur himself, laughing wickedly.

There was a rush of soldiers and up the low hillock raced a score of them toward us.

"Run!" shouted Rador.

"Not much!" grunted O'Keefe—and took swift aim at Lugur. The automatic spat; Olaf's echoed. Both bullets went wide, for Lugur, still laughing, threw himself into the protection of the body of his shell. But following the shots, from the file of moss heaps came a series of muffled explosions. Under the pistols' concussions the mitered caps had burst and instantly all about the running soldiers grew a cloud of tiny, glistening white spores, like a little cloud of puff-ball dust many times magnified.

Through this cloud I glimpsed their faces, stricken with an agony I could not fathom.

Some turned to fly, but before they could take a second step stood rigid.

The spore cloud drifted and eddied about them; rained down on their heads and half bare breasts, covered their garments—and swiftly they began to change! Their features grew indistinct, merged! The glistening white spores that covered them turned to a pale yellow, grew greenish, spread and swelled, darkened. The eyes of one of the soldiers glinted for a moment, and then were covered by the swift growth!

Where but a few moments before had been men were only grotesque heaps, swiftly melting, swiftly rounding into the semblance of the mounds that lay behind us—and already beginning to take on their gleam of ancient viridescence!

The Irishman was gripping my arm fiercely; the pain brought me back to my senses.

"Olaf's right," he gasped. "This *is* hell! I'm sick."

Lugur and his companions awakened from their nightmare; piled into the *coria*, wheeled, raced away.

"On!" said Rador thickly. "Two perils have we passed. The Silent Ones watch over us!"

SOON we were again among the familiar and so unfamiliar moss giants. I knew what I had seen and this time Larry could not call me superstitious. In the jungles of Borneo I had examined that other swiftly developing fungus which wreaks the vengeance of some of the hill tribes upon those who steal their women; gripping with its microscopic hooks into the flesh; sending quick, tiny rootlets through the skin down into the capillaries, sucking life and thriving and never to be torn away until the living thing it clings to has been sapped dry.

Here was but another of the species in which the development's rate was incredibly accelerated.

Rador stopped. In front of us was again the road ribbon.

"Now is all danger passed," he said. "The way lies open and Lugur has deliberately fled—"

There was a flash from the road. It passed me like a little lariat of light. It struck Larry squarely between the eyes, spread over his face and drew itself within!

"Down!" cried Rador, and hurled me to the ground. My head struck sharply; I felt myself grow faint; Olaf fell beside me. I saw the green dwarf draw down the O'Keefe; he collapsed limply, face still, eyes staring. A shout, and from the roadway poured a host of Lugur's men.

There came a rush of little feet. Soft, fragrant draperies brushed my face. Dimly I watched Lakla bend over the Irishman.

She straightened, her arms swept out and the writhing vine, with its tendriled heads of ruby bloom, five flames of misty incandescence, leaped into the face of the soldiers now close upon us. It darted at their throats, striking, coiling, and striking again; coiling and uncoiling with incredible rapidity and flying from leverage points of throats, of faces, of breasts like a great green spring endowed with consciousness, volition and hatred. And those it struck stood rigid with faces masks of

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inhuman fear and anguish; and those still unstricken fled.

Another rush of feet, and down upon Lugur's forces poured the frog-men, their booming giant leading, thrusting with their lances, tearing and rending with talons and fangs and spurs.

Against that onrush the dwarfs could not stand. They raced for the shells; I heard Lugur shouting, menacingly. And then Lakla's voice, pealing like a golden bugle of wrath:

"Go, Lugur!" she cried. "Go, that you and Yolara and your Shining One may die together! Death for you, Lugur. Death for you all! Remember Lugur—death!"

There was a great noise within my head —no matter, Lakla was here. Lakla, here —but too late. Lugur had outplayed us; moss death nor dragon worm had frightened him away. He had crept back to trap us. Lakla had come too late. Larry was dead— Larry! But I had heard no banshee wailing, and Larry had said he could not die without that warning. No, Larry was not dead.

A horny arm lifted me; two enormous, oddly gentle saucer eyes were staring into mine; my head rolled; I caught a glimpse of Lakla kneeling beside the O'Keefe.

The noise in my head grew thunderous, was carrying me away on its thunder— swept me into soft, blind darkness.

CHAPTER XIV

THE THREE SILENT ONES

I WAS in the heart of a rose petal, swinging, swinging; no, I was in a rosy dawn cloud, pendulous in space. Consciousness flooded me; in reality I was in the arms of one of the man frogs, carrying me as though I were a babe, and we were passing through some place suffused with glow enough like heart of pearl or dawn cloud to justify my awakening vagaries.

Just ahead walked Lakla in earnest talk with Rador, and content enough was I for a time to watch her. She had thrown off the metallic robes; her thick braids of golden brown with their flame glints of bronze were twined in a high coronal meshed in silken net of green; little clustering curls escaped from it, clinging to the nape of the proud white neck, shyly kissing it. From her shoulders fell a loose, sleeveless garment of shimmering green belted with a high golden girdle; skirt folds dropping barely below the knees.

She had cast aside her buskins, too, and the slender, high-arched feet were sandaled. She walked like one of Diana's nymphs, free, floating, delicately graceful, but with none of that serpent touch entwined in the least of Yolara's movements. Between the buckled edges of her kirtle I caught gleams of translucent ivory as exquisitely molded, as delectably rounded, as those revealed beneath the hem.

"Put me down," I demanded to my bearer.

He tightened his hold; round eyes upon the Golden Girl. She turned and spoke— in sonorous, reverberating monosyllables— and I was set upon my feet; I leaped to the side of the Irishman. He lay limp, with a disquieting, abnormal sequacity, as though every bone and muscle were utterly flaccid. The flesh was stone cold; the pulse barely perceptible, long intervaled; the respiration undiscoverable. There were no nervous reflexes or reactions; the pupils of the eyes were enormously dilated; it was as though life had been drawn from every nerve.

"What did this?" I asked.

Lakla shook her head, looking at Rador, the trouble in her eyes deepening.

"At first I thought it was the *Keth* that was cast, but—" The green dwarf hesitated.

"A light flashed from the road. It struck his face and seemed to sink in," I said.

"I saw," answered Rador; "but what it was I know not; and I thought I knew all the weapons of our rulers." He glanced at me curiously. "Some talk there has been that the stranger who came with you, Double Tongue, was making new death tools for Lugur," he ended.

Von Hetzdorp! The German at work already in this storehouse of devastating energies, fashioning the weapons for his plots! The Apocalyptic vision swept back upon me, and I resolved that this quick blossoming of dread possibilities I had foreseen should be destroyed before it fruited —aye, and Von Hetbdorp with it.

"He is not dead." Lakla's voice was poignant. "He is not dead; and the Three have wondrous healing. They can restore him if they will—and they will, they *will!*" For a moment she was silent. "Now their gods help Lugur and Yolara," she whispered; "for come what may, whether the Silent Ones be strong or weak, if he dies surely will I fall upon them with my *Akka* and I will slay those two with the *Yekta* death— with my own hands—yea, though I too, perish!"

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"Yolara and Lugur shall both die," Olaf's eyes were burning. "But Lugur is mine to slay."

That pity I had seen before in Lakla's eyes when she looked upon the Norseman banished the white wrath from them. She turned, half hurriedly, as though to escape his gaze, fastened upon her with hope-poised yearning.

He sighed, dropping behind.

"The white maiden knows," he murmured. "Not yet does she will to speak, and until she speaks I will not despair—no!"

Lakla glanced behind.

"Walk with us," she said to me, "unless you are still weak."

I shook my head, gave a last look at O'Keefe; there was nothing I could do; I stepped beside her. She thrust a white arm into mine protectingly, the wonderfully chiseled hand with it long, tapering fingers catching about my wrist; my heart glowed toward her.

"Soon we walk no more," she said. "When the Portal called, we sped back, my *Akka* and I, leaving the bearers behind. They wait for us, not far ahead. Are you strong enough?" she asked anxiously. "Or shall I call upon Ork to carry you again?"

I shook my head vigorously.

"Your medicine is potent, handmaiden," I answered. "And the touch of your hand would give me strength enough, even had I not drunk it," I added in Larry's best manner.

Her eyes danced, trouble flying.

"Now, that was well spoken for such a man of wisdom as Rador tells me you are." She laughed, and a little pang shot through me. Could not a lover of science present a compliment without it always seeming to be as unusual as plucking a damask rose from a cabinet of fossils? Ah, well, as I have said, those who swear allegiance to Minerva must expect the suspicion of Aphrodite.

Mustering my philosophy, I smiled back at her. Again I noted that broad, classic brow, with the little tendrils of shining bronze caressing it, the tilted, delicate, nut-brown brows that gave a curious touch of innocent *diablerie* to the lovely face—flowerlike, pure, high-bred. A touch of roguishness, subtly alluring, sparkling over the maiden Madonna-ness that lay ever like a delicate, luminous suggestion beneath it.

"What is wisdom, O maiden, but clear seeing and understanding?" I replied. "And never has my wisdom, such as it is, seen clearer than when I look upon your countenance."

A little flush sped over her face. Rador laughed.

"I have always liked you," she murmured naïvely, enchantingly embarrassed "since first I saw you in that place where the Shining One goes forth into your world. And I am glad you like—you like my medicine as well as that you carry in the black box that you left behind," she added.

"How know you of that, Lakla?" I gasped.

"Oft and oft I came to him there, and to you, while you lay sleeping. How call you *him?*" She paused.

"Larry!" I said.

"Larry!" She repeated it excellently. "And you?"

"Goodwin," said Rador.

I bowed quite as though I were being introduced to some charming young lady met in that old world life now seemingly eons removed.

"Yes, Goodwin," she said. "Oft and oft I came. Sometimes I thought you saw me. And he—did he not dream of me sometimes?" she asked wistfully.

"He did," I said, "and watched for you." The amazement grew vocal. "But how came you?" I asked.

"By a strange road," she answered, "to see that all was well with him, and to look into his heart; for I feared Yolara and her beauty. But I saw that she was not in his heart." A blush burned over her. "It is a strange road," she went on hurriedly. "Many times have I followed it and watched the Shining One bear back its prey to the blue pool; seen the woman *he* seeks"—she made a quick gesture toward Olaf—"and a babe cast from her arms in the last pang of her mother love; seen another woman throw herself into the Shining One's embrace to save a man she loved; and I could not help!" Her voice grew deep, thrilled. "The friend, it comes to me, who drew you here, Goodwin!"

Unable to speak, I stared at her in stark astonishment.

"Well," she said, "you must pass upon that road, too, Goodwin; and he, if he live, to see what you must—the Silent Ones are speaking to me, and by that I know he shall live." Her face was rapt, with that expression that Delphi's pythoness must have borne, listening to the whispers of Apollo. "But not he—not the great one you call Olaf; he may not pass upon it."

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she murmured, and again the pity welled up in the eyes of gold.

She was silent, walking as one who sees visions and listens to voices unheard by others. Rador made a warning gesture; I crowded back my questions, glanced about me. We were passing over a smooth strand, hard packed as some beach of long- thrust-back ocean. It was like crushed garnets, each grain stained deep red, faintly sparkling. On each side were distances, the floor stretching away into them bare of vegetation—stretching on and on into infinitudes of rosy mist, even as did the space above.

Flanking and behind us marched the giant batracians, fivescore of them at least, black scale and crimson scale lustrous and gleaming in the rosaceous radiance; saucer eyes, shining circles of phosphorescence, green, purple, red; spurs clicking as they crouched along with a gait at once grotesque and formidable.

AHEAD the mist deepened into a ruddier glow; through it a long, dark line began to appear—the mouth, I thought, of the caverned space through which we were going; it was just before us; over us—we stood bathed in a flood of rubescence!

A sea stretched before us—a crimson sea, gleaming like that lost lacquer of royal coral and the Flame Dragon's blood which Fu S'cze set upon the bower he built for the sun maiden he had stolen—that going toward it she might think it the sun itself rising over the summer seas. Unmoved by wave or ripple, it was placid as some deep woodland pool when night rushes up over the world.

About it was no hint of stagnancy, no unpleasant suggestion of tide of blood. Rather it seemed molten, or as though some hand great enough to rock earth had distilled here from conflagrations of autumn sunsets their flaming essences.

A fish broke through, large as a shark, blunt-headed, flashing bronze, ridged and mailed as though with serrated plates of armor. It leaped high, shaking from it a sparkling spray of rubies; dropped and shot up a geyser of fiery gems.

Across my line of vision, moving stately over the sea, floated a half globe, luminous, diaphanous, its iridescence melting into turquoise, thence to amethyst, to orange, to scarlet shot with rose, to vermilion, a translucent green, thence back into the iridescence. Behind it were four others, and the least of them ten feet in diameter, and the largest no less than thirty. They drifted past like bubbles blown from froth of rainbows by pipes in mouths of Titans' young. Then from the base of one arose a tangle of shimmering strands. Long, slender, whiplashes that played about and sank slowly again beneath the crimson surface.

I gasped, for the fish had been a ganoid, that ancient, armored form that was perhaps the most intelligent of all life on our planet during the Devonian era. But these for age upon age had vanished, save for their fossils held in the embrace of the stone that once was their soft bottom bed. And the half-globes were *Medusae,* jellyfish of a size, luminosity, and color unheard of.

Now Lakla cupped her mouth with pink palms and sent a clarion note ringing out. The ledge on which we stood continued a few hundred feet before us, falling abruptly, though from no great height to the Crimson Sea. At right and left it extended in a long semicircle. Turning to the right whence she had sent her call, I saw rising a mile or more away, veiled lightly by the haze, a rainbow, a gigantic prismatic arch, flattened, I thought, by some quality of the strange atmosphere. It sprang from the ruddy strand, leaped the crimson tide, and dropped three miles away upon a precipitous, jagged upthrust of rock frowning black from the lacquered depths.

And surmounting a higher ledge beyond this upthrust a huge dome of dull gold, Cyclopean, striking eyes and mind with something unhumanly alien, baffling. Sending the mind groping, as though across the deserts of space, from some far-flung star, should fall upon us linked sounds, coherent certainly, meaningful surely, vaguely familiar. Yet never to be translated into any symbol or thought of our own particular planet.

This sea of crimson lacquer, with its floating moons of luminous color—this bow of prismed light leaping to the weird aisle crowned by the anamalous, aureate—excrescence—the half human batracians—the elf land through which we had passed with all its hidden wonders and terrors—I felt the foundations of my cherished knowledge shaking. Was this all a dream? Was this body of mine lying somewhere, fighting a fevered death, and all these but images floating through the breaking chambers of my brain? My knees shook; I groaned.

Lakla turned, looked at me anxiously, slipped a soft arm behind me, held me till the vertigo passed.

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"Patience," she said. "The bearers come. Soon you shall rest."

I looked; down toward us from the bow's end were leaping swiftly another score of frog-men. Some bore litters, high, handled, not unlike palanquins—

"Asgard!" Olaf stood beside me, eyes burning, pointing to the arch. "Bifrost Bridge, sharp as sword edge, over which souls go to Valhalla. And *she*—she is a *valkyr*—a sword maiden, *ja!*"

I gripped the Norseman's hand. It was hot, and a pang of remorse shot through me. If this place had so shaken me, how must it have shaken Olaf, who had neither my armor of science nor Larry's protecting belief that outside of Ireland could occur only wholly natural phenomena. As soon as we reached wherever we were going, Olaf must be cared for—surely only his obsessing grief and his fixed idea of vengeance could have carried him so far!

And it was with relief that I watched him, at Lakla's gentle command, drop humbly into one of the litters and lie back, eyes closed, as two of the monsters raised its yoke to their scaled shoulders. Nor was it without further relief that I myself lay back on the soft velvety cushions of another.

The cavalcade began to move. Lakla had ordered O'Keefe placed beside her, and she sat, knees crossed Orient fashion, leaning over the pale head on her lap, the white, tapering fingers straying fondly through his hair.

Presently I saw her reach up, slowly unwind a coronal of her tresses, shake them loose, and let them fall like a veil over her and him.

Her head bent low; I heard a soft sobbing—I turned away my gaze, lorn enough in my own heart, God knew!

THE arch was closer, and in my awe as I looked upon it I forgot for the moment Larry and aught else. For this was no rainbow, no thing born of light and mist, no Bifrost Bridge of myth—no! It was a flying arch of stone, stained with flares of Tyrian purples, of royal scarlets, of blues dark as the Gulf Stream's ribbon, sapphires soft as midday May skies, splashes of chromes and greens. A palette of giantry, a bridge of wizardry; a hundred, nay, a thousand, times greater than that of Utah which the Navaho call Nonnegozche and worship, as well they may, as a god, and which is itself a rainbow in eternal rock.

It sprang from the ledge and winged its prodigious length in one low arc over the sea's crimson breast. As though in some ancient paroxysm of earth it had been hurled molten, crystallizing into that stupendous span and still flaming with the fires that had molded it.

Closer we came and closer, while I watched spellbound; now we were at its head, and the litter-bearers swept upon it. All of five hundred feet wide it was, surface smooth as a city road, sides low walled, curving inward as though in the jetting-out of its making the edges of the plastic rock had curled.

On and on we sped; the high thrusting precipices upon which the bridge's far end rested, frowned close; the enigmatic, dully shining dome loomed ever greater. Now we had reached that end; were passing over a smooth plaza whose level door was enclosed, save for a rift in front of us, by the fanged tops of the black cliffs.

From this rift stretched another span, half a mile long, perhaps, widening at its center into a broad platform. It continued straight to two massive gates set within the face of the second cliff wall like panels, and of the same dull gold as the dome rising high beyond. And this smaller arch passed over a pit, an abyss, of which the outer precipices were the rim holding back from the pit the red flood.

We were rapidly approaching; now upon the platform, my bearers were striding closely along the side. I leaned out—a giddiness seized me! I gazed down into depth upon vertiginous depth; an abyss indeed. An abyss dropping to world's base like that in which the Babylonians believed writhed Talaat, the serpent mother of Chaos; a pit that struck down into earth's heart itself. It was as though I were looking over the edge of a world into illimitable space.

Now, what was that, distance upon unfathomable distance below? A stupendous glowing like the green fire of life itself. What was it like? I had it! It was like the corona of the sun in eclipse—that other burgeoning of unknown elements that makes of our luminary when moon veils it an incredible blossoming of splendors in the black heavens.

And strangely, strangely, it was like the Dweller's beauty when with its dazzling spiralings and whirlings it raced amid its storm of crystal bell sounds!

The abyss was behind us; we had paused at the golden portals; they swung inward. A wide corridor filled with soft light was before us; and on its threshold stood—

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bizarre, yellow gems gleaming, huge muzzle wide in what was evidently meant for a smile of welcome—the woman frog of the Moon Pool wall. And from behind her leaped a frog-child, black and scarlet as were our guards, who with little croakings and boomings of joy jumped into the arms of the giant who had led us—he who had gone before Lakla at Yolara's interrupted feast, and whose beastly club had so narrowly missed scattering the brains of O'Keefe.

Lakla raised her head; swept back the silken tent of her hair and gazed at me with eyes misty from weeping. The frog-woman crept to her side; gazed down upon Larry; spoke—spoke—to the Golden Girl in a swift stream of the sonorous, reverberating monosyllables; and Lakla answered her in kind. The webbed digits swept over O'Keefe's face, felt at his heart; she shook her head and moved with extraordinary rapidity ahead of us up the passage. The golden gates closed.

STILL borne in the litters we went on, winding, ascending until at last they were set down in a great hall carpeted with soft fragrant rushes and into which from high narrow slits streamed the crimson light from without.

I jumped over to Larry; there had been no change in his condition; still the terrifying limpness, the slow, infrequent pulsation. Rador and Olaf—and the fever now seemed to be gone from him—came and stood beside me, silent.

"I go to the Three," said Lakla. "Wait you here." She passed through a curtaining; nor one word did we utter until she returned, standing there about the body of the man whom each of us, in his own fashion, loved well. Then as swiftly as she had gone she came through the hangings; tresses braided, a swathing of golden gauze about her.

"Rador," she said, "bear you Larry—for into your heart the Silent Ones would look. And fear nothing," she added at the green dwarf's disconcerted, almost fearful start.

Rador bowed, started to lift O'Keefe; was thrust aside by Olaf.

"No," said the Norseman; "I will carry him."

He lifted Larry like a child against his broad breast. The dwarf glanced quickly at Lakla; she nodded.

"Come!" she commanded, and held aside the folds.

Of that journey I have few memories. I only know that we went through corridor upon corridor; successions of vast halls and chambers, some carpeted with the rushes, others with rugs into which the feet sank as into deep, soft meadows. There were glimpses of things carved, things wrought and woven; brilliant screens of feathers; great tapestries and odd, unfamiliar, thronelike seats. Divans like giants' beds; spaces illuminated by the rubrous light, and spaces in which softer lights held sway.

We paused before a slab of the same crimson stone as that the green dwarf had called the Portal, and upon its polished surface, even as they had upon it, weaved the unnameable symbols. The Golden Girl pressed upon its side; it slipped softly back; a torrent of opalescence gushed out of the opening—and as one in a dream I entered.

We were, I knew, just under the dome; but for the moment, caught in the flood of radiance, I could see nothing. It was like being held within a fire opal—so brilliant, so flashing, was it. I closed my eyes, opened them; the lambency cascaded from the vast curves of the globular walls. In front of me was a long, wide opening in them, through which, far away, I could see the end of the wizards' bridge, and the ledged opening of the cavern through which we had come. Against the light from within beat the crimson light from without—and was checked as though by a barrier.

I felt Lakla's touch; turned.

A hundred paces away was a dais, its rim raised a yard above the floor. From the edge of this rim, streamed upward a steady, coruscating mist of the opalescence, veined even as was that of the Dweller's shining core and shot with milky shadows like curdled moonlight; up it stretched like a wall.

Over it, from it, down upon me, gazed three faces—two clearly male, one a woman's. At the first I thought them statues, and then the eyes of them gave the lie to me; for the eyes were alive, terribly, and if I could admit the word—*supernaturally*—alive.

They were thrice the size of the human eye and triangular, the apex of the angle upward; black as jet, pupiless, filled with tiny, leaping red flames. And they were the eyes of that little cloud I had seen hovering aboout Lakla in what I had then thought to be surely a singularly vivid dream.

Over them were foreheads, not as ours—high and broad and vizored. Their sides

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drawn upward into a vertical ridge; a prominence, an upright wedge, somewhat like the vizored heads of some of the great lizards. And the heads, long, narrowing at the back, were fully twice the size of mankind's!

Upon the brows were caps, and with a fearful certainty, I knew that they were *not* caps. Long, thick strands of gleaming, yellow, feathered scales, thin as sequins! Sharp, curving noses like the beaks of the giant condors; mouths thin, austere; long, powerful, pointed chins. The—*flesh*—of the faces white as whitest marble; and wreathing up to them, covering all their bodies, the shimmering, curdled, misty fires of opalescence!

Olaf stood rigid; my own heart leaped wildly. What—what were these strange beings?

I forced myself to look again—and from their gaze streamed a current of reassurance, of will—nay, of intense spiritual strength. I saw that they were not fierce, not ruthless, not inhuman, despite their strangeness. No, they were kindly, in some unmistakable way, benign and sorrowful. So sorrowful! I straightened, gazed back at them fearlessly. Olaf drew a deep breath, gazed steadily, too, the hardness, the despair wiped from his face.

NOW Lakla drew closer to the dais; the three pairs of eyes searched hers, the woman's with an ineffable tenderness; some message seemed to pass between the three and the Golden Girl. She bowed low, turned to the Norseman.

"Place Larry there," she said softly—"there, right at the feet of the Silent Ones."

She pointed into the radiant mist; Olaf started, hesitated, stared from Lakla to the Three, searched for a moment their eyes—and something like a smile drifted through them. He stepped forward, lifted O'Keefe, set him squarely within the covering light. It wavered, rolled upward, swirled about the body, steadied again—and within it there was no sign at all of Larry!

Again the mist wavered, shook, and seemed to climb higher, hiding the chins, the beaked noses, the brows of that incredible Trinity. But before it ceased to climb, I thought I saw the yellow, feathered heads bend; sensed a movement as though they lifted something.

The mist fell; the eyes gleamed out again, inscrutable.

And groping out of the radiance, pausing at the verge of the dais, leaping down from it, came Larry, laughing, filled with life, blinking as one who draws from darkness into sunshine.

He saw Lakla, sprang to her, gripped her in his arms.

"Lakla!" he cried. *"Mavourneen!"*

Swiftly she slipped from his embrace, blushing, glancing at the Three shyly, half-fearfully. And again I saw the tenderness creep into the inky, flame-shot orbs of the woman being; and a tenderness in the others, too—as though they regarded some well-beloved child.

"Doc," shouted Larry, catching me by the hand, "what hit me? Say, I've had some dream. Where are we?"

Lakla touched his arm and proceeded to answer his question.

"You lay in the arms of Death, Larry," she said. "And the Silent Ones drew you from him. Do homage to the Silent Ones, Larry, for they are good and they are mighty!"

She turned his head with one of the long, white hands—and he looked into the faces of the Three; looked long, was shaken even as had been Olaf and myself. And he stiffened under that same wave of power and of—of—what can I call it?—holiness that streamed from them.

Then for the first time I saw real awe mount into his face. Another moment he stared, and dropped upon one knee and bowed his head before them as would a worshiper before the shrine of his saint. And—I am not ashamed to tell it—I joined him; and with us knelt Lakla and Olaf and Rador.

We bent there, my heart as full of thanksgiving and of confidence as a child who has passed through nightmare land into safe fireside haven. I looked up; the eyes of the Trinity were soft, the leaping flames within them quiet, the black depths filled with tenderness.

Then the mist of fiery opal swirled up, covering them.

And with a long, deep, joyous sigh Lakla took Larry's hand, drew him to his feet, and silently we followed them out of that hall of wonder.

But why, in going, did the thought come to me that from where the Three sat throned they ever watched the cavern mouth that was the door into their abode; and looked down ever into the unfathomable depth in which glowed and pulsed that mystic flower, colossal, awesome, of green flame that had seemed to me fire of life itself?

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CHAPTER XV

THE WOOING OF LAKLA

I HAD slept soundly and dreamlessly. I wakened quietly in the great chamber into which Rador had ushered O'Keefe and myself after that culminating experience of crowded, nerve-racking hours—the facing of the weird Three.

"Wake up!" shouted Larry. "Wake up, ye seething caldron of fossilized superstitions! Wake up, ye bogey-haunted man of scientific wisdom!"

Under pillow and insults I bounced to my feet, filled for a moment with quite real wrath. He lay back, roaring with laughter, and my anger was swept away.

"Doc," he said, very seriously, after this, "I know who the Three are!"

"Yes?" I queried with studied sarcasm.

"Yes," he mimicked. He paused under the menace of my look, grinned. "Yes, I know," he continued. "They're of the *Tuatha De,* the old ones, the great people of Ireland; that's who they are!"

I shook my head.

"Well, what do you think?" he asked wearily.

"I think," I said cautiously, "that we face an evolution of highly intelligent beings from ancestral sources radically removed from those through which mankind ascended. These half-human, highly developed batracians they call the *Akka,* prove that evolution in these caverned spaces has certainly pursued one different path than on earth.

"What I think, since you have asked me, Larry O'Keefe," I went on, "is that the Three are of a race which came up from a lizard form.

"Finally, I think that the race to which the Three belong never appeared on earth's surface; that their development took place here unhindered through hundreds of thousands of years. During which, because of its chaotic condition, any higher intelligence could not have existed on the surface of our planet. If this is true, the structure of their brains, and therefore their reactions and potentialities must be different from ours. Hence their knowledge and command of energies unfamiliar to us—and hence, also, the grave question whether they may not have an entirely different sense of justice, of values—and that is rather terrifying!" I concluded.

"That last sort of knocks your argument, Doc," he said. "They had sense of justice enough to help me out. And certainly they know love. For I saw the way they looked at Lakla; and sorrow—for there was no mistaking that in their faces."

"I consider that a frivolous objection, Larry," I answered, a bit nonplused.

"You scientists are an inhuman lot, sometimes," he said. "That's why I like you to be superstitious now and then. It shows you're not fossilized!"

Just then the curtains parted, and in walked Rador.

"You have rested well," he smiled. "I can see. The handmaiden bade me call you. You are to eat with her in her garden."

O'Keefe was hustling into his clothes.

"Can you swim in that red stuff out there, Uncle?" he asked.

"Don't you ever try it, Larree." Rador was plainly appalled. "There's a pool here—I'll show it to you. In the meantime—" He spun out through the hangings, returning a moment later with two man frogs carrying basins filled with clear water. Into these we dipped our hands and faces.

Down long corridors we trod, then, and out upon a gardened terrace as beautiful as any of those of Yolara's city. Bowered, blossoming, fragrant, set high upon the cliffs beside the domed castle. A table, as of milky jade, was spread at one corner, but the Golden Girl was not there. A little path ran on and up, hemmed in by the mass of verdure. I looked at it longingly; Rador saw the glance; interpreted it and led me up the stepped, sharp slope into a rocky embrasure.

Here I was above the foliage, and everywhere the view was clear. Below me stretched the incredible bridge, with the frog people hurrying back and forth upon it.

I faced an immensity of crimson waters, unbroken, a true sea, if ever there was one. A little breeze blew— the first real wind I had encountered in the hidden places; under it the surface, that had been as molten lacquer, rippled and dimpled. Little waves broke with a spray of rose-pearls and rubies. The giant *Medusae* drifted—stately, luminous, kaleidoscopic elfin moons.

Far down, peeping around a jutting tower of the cliff, I saw dipping, with the motion of the waves, a floating garden. The flowers, too, were luminous, indeed sparkling. Gleaming brilliants of scarlet and vermilions lighter than the flood on which they lay. Mauves and odd shades of reddish-blue. They glimmered and shone like a little lake of jewels.

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A thought with me since our flight claimed utterance.

"Rador," I said, "if it is permissible to tell—how did Lakla, who is your sister's child, come to be handmaiden to the Three?"

"I can tell you that now, Goodwin," he answered. "I told you that of the Murians there are the black-haired, who are the *ladala,* and the soldiers from them; and the fair-haired, who are the rulers. From among the *ladala,* never from among the rulers, there is born once in two generations a girl baby whose eyes are golden; whose hair, even as a babe, is like that of Lakla's, and who is in other ways—different.

"Now, there are some who say that this child is of a strain that was among our people before we found this land and which strain was destroyed, for a certain reason, by the fair-haired. And there are others who say that the Silent Ones have something to do with it. Whatever the reason, by an ancient pact with the Three, this child, when it is but three months old, is carried here and given to the handmaiden who then serves. She it is who rears and instructs it, and when the child it fourteen *laya* old she takes the place of that handmaiden who has before her cared for it."

"And what becomes of the other one?" I asked.

"She—goes!" he answered. "She has the right, if she will, to chose a mate from the *ladala.* But none has done so. It is said that as reward—and perhaps because she is no more like the Murians than the Three—she is taken to that land of wonder beyond the black precipices of Doul. Or it may be that she goes where those who are the race of the Silent Ones dwell. I do not know."

"And where is that?" I asked. He shook his head.

"Lakla comes!" he said. "Let us go down."

It was a shy Lakla who came slowly around the end of the path and, blushing furiously, held her hands out to Larry. And the Irishman took them, placed them over his heart, kissed them with a tenderness that had been lacking in the half-mocking, half-fierce caresses he had given the priestess. She blushed deeper, holding out the tapering fingers—then pressed them to her own heart.

"I like the touch of your lips, Larry," she whispered. "They warm me here." She pressed her heart again. "And they send little sparkles of light through me." Her brows tilted perplexedly, accenting the nuance of *diablerie,* delicate and fascinating, that they cast upon the flower face.

"Do you?" whispered the O'Keefe fervently. "Do you, Lakla?" He bent toward her. She caught the amused glance of Rador, drew herself aside half-haughtily.

"Rador," she said, "is it not time that you and the strong one, Olaf, were setting forth?"

"Truly it is, handmaiden," he answered respectfully enough, yet with a current of laughter under his words. "But as you know the strong one, Olaf, wished to see his friends here before we were gone. And he comes even now," he added, glancing down the pathway along which came striding the Norseman.

As he faced us I saw that a transformation had been wrought in him. Gone was the pitiful seeking, and gone, too, the hope. About him was implacable resolution, stony determination of one who knows the worst and has consecrated body and soul to meet and destroy it. The set lines softened as he looked at the Golden Girl and bowed low to her. He thrust a hand to O'Keefe and to me.

"There is to be battle," he said. "I go with Rador to call the armies of these frog people. As for me—Lakla has spoken. There is no hope for—for mine Helma in life, but there is hope that we destroy the Shining Devil and give mine Helma peace. And with that I am well content, *ja!* Well content!" He gripped our hands again. "We will fight!" he muttered. *"Ja!* And I will have vengeance!" The sternness returned; and with a salute Rador and he were gone.

Two great tears rolled from the golden eyes of Lakla.

"Not even the Shining One can heal those the Shining One has taken," she said. "He asked me, and it was better that I tell. It is part of the Three's—*punishment*—but of that you will soon learn," she went on hurriedly. "Ask me no questions now of the Silent Ones. I thought it better for Olaf to go with Rador, to busy himself, to give his mind other than sorrow upon which to feed."

UP THE path came five of the frog women, bearing platters and ewers. Their bracelets and anklets of jewels were tinkling; their middles covered with short kirtles of woven cloth studded with the sparkling ornaments.

And here let me say that if I have

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given the impression that the *Akka* are simply magnified frogs, I regret it. Frog-like they are, and hence my phrase for them. But they are as unlike the frog, as we know it, as man is unlike the chimpanzee. Springing, I hazard, from the stegocephalia, the ancestor of the frogs, these batracians followed a different line of evolution and acquired the upright position just as man did from the four-footed folk.

The great staring eyes, the shape of the muzzle were froglike, but the highly developed brain had set upon the head and shape of it vital differences. The forehead, for instance, was not low, flat, and retreating—its frontal arch was well defined. The head was, in a sense, well shaped, and with the females the great horny carapace that stood over it like a fantastic helmet was much modified, as were the spurs that were so formidable in the male; coloration was different also. The torso was upright; the legs a little bent, giving them their crouching gait—but I wander from my subject.

They set their burdens down. Larry looked at them with interest.

"You surely have those things well trained, Lakla," he said.

"Things!" The handmaiden arose, eyes flashing. "You call my *Akka* things!"

"Well," said Larry, a bit taken aback, "what do you call them?"

"My *Akka* are a people," she retorted. "As much a people as your race or mine. They are good and loyal, and they have speech and arts, and they slay not, save for food or to protect themselves. And I think them beautiful, Larry, beautiful!" She stamped her foot. "And you call them things!"

Beautiful! These? Yet, after all, they were, in their grotesque fashion. And to Lakla, surrounded by them, from babyhood, they were not strange at all. Why shouldn't she think them beautiful? The same thought must have struck O'Keefe, for he flushed guiltily.

"I think them beautiful, too, Lakla," he said remorsefully. "It's my not knowing your tongue too well that traps me. Truly, I think them beautiful. I'd tell them so, if I knew their talk."

Lakla dimpled, laughed, spoke to the attendants in that strange speech that was unquestionably a language. They bridled, looked at O'Keefe with fantastic coquetry, clacked and boomed softly among themselves.

"They say they like you better than any of the men of Muria," laughed Lakla.

"Did I ever think I'd be swapping compliments with lady frogs!" he murmured to me. "Buck up, Larry. Keep your eye on the captive Irish princess!" he muttered to himself.

"Rador goes to meet one of the *Iadala* who is slipping through with news," said the Golden Girl as we addressed ourselves to the food. "Then, with Nak, he and Olaf go to muster the *Akka*, for there will be battle, and we must prepare. Nak," she added, "is he who went before me when you were dancing with Yolara, Larry." She stole a swift, mischievous glance at him. "He is headman of all the *Akka*."

"How comes the messenger through?" I asked. "Can he open the Portal?"

"No, but there are other ways," she answered, "although perilous, like that you took."

"I should think with what's brewing outside they would be guarded," said Larry.

"No," replied Lakla, almost indifferently. "Not many would dare take them; not many could pass over them unscathed. And there are always the guards at the gateway of the bridge there that none may pass. To come in force to be feared, they must go through the Portal, and it will give us warning. Besides, it will take all of four *tals* for them to plan and prepare, and during that time we will also have prepared."

"Just what force can we muster against them when they come, darlin'?" said Larry.

"Darlin'?" The Golden Girl had caught the caress of the word. "What's that?"

"It's a little word that means Lakla," he answered. "It does, that is, when I say it. When you say it, it means Larry."

"I like that word," mused Lakla.

"You can even say Larry darlin'!" suggested O'Keefe.

"Larry darlin'!" said Lakla. "When they come we shall have first of all my *Akka*—"

"Can they fight, *mavourneen?"* interrupted Larry.

"Can they fight! My *Akka!"* Again her eyes flashed. "They will fight to the last of them with the spears that give the swift rotting, covered, as they are, with the jelly of those *Saddu* there." She pointed through a rift in the foliage, across which on the surface of the sea, was floating one of the moon globes. And now I knew why Rador had warned Larry against a plunge there. "With spears and

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clubs and with teeth and nails and spurs. They are strong and brave people, Larry darlin', and though they hurl the *Keth* at them, it is slow to work upon them, and they slay even while they are passing into the nothingness!"

"And have we none of the *Keth?*" he asked.

"No." She shook her head. "None of their weapons have we here, although it was—it was the Ancient Ones who shaped them."

"But the Three are of the Ancient Ones?" I cried. "Surely they can tell."

"No," she said slowly. "No, there is something to be told you—and soon; and then the Silent Ones say you will understand. You, especially, Goodwin, who worship wisdom."

THE raptness vanished, her eyes cleared.

"Then," said Larry, "we have the *Akka;* and we have the four men of us, and among us three guns and about a hundred cartridges—an'—an' the power of the Three— But what about the Shining One. Fireworks—"

"I do not know." Again the indecision that had been in her eyes when Yolara had launched her defiance crept back. "The Shining One is strong, and he has his slaves!"

"Well, we'd better get busy good and quick!" the O'Keefe's voice rang. But Lakla, for some reason of her own, would pursue the matter no further. The trouble fled from her eyes. They danced.

"Larry darlin'!" she murmured. "I like the touch of your lips—"

"You do?" he whispered, all thought flying of anything but the beautiful, provocative face so close to his. "Then, *acushla,* you're goin' to get acquainted with 'em! Turn your head, Doc!" he said.

And I turned it. There was quite a long silence, broken by an interested, soft outburst of gentle booming from the serving frog maids. I stole a glance behind me. Lakla's head lay on the Irishman's shoulder, the golden eyes misty sun-pools of love and adoration. And the O'Keefe, a new look of power and strength upon his clear-cut features, was looking down into them with that look which rises only from the heart touched for the first time with that true, all-powerful love, which is the pulse of the universe itself. The real music of the spheres of which Plato dreamed, the love that is stronger than death itself, immortal as the high gods and the true soul of all that mystery we call life.

Then Lakla raised her hands, pressed down Larry's head, kissed him between the eyes. She drew herself with a trembling little laugh very slowly from his embrace.

"My mate," she murmured, the golden voice throbbing.

"The future Mrs. Larry O'Keefe, Goodwin," said Larry to me a little unsteadily.

I took their hands—and Lakla kissed me!

"Soon," she said, "I must wait upon the Three. They have a message for you."

We turned to go, and around the corner of the path I caught another glimpse of what I have called the lake of jewels. I pointed to it.

"Those are lovely flowers, Lakla," I said. "I have never seen anything like them in the place from whence we come."

She followed my pointing finger, laughed.

"Come," she said, "let me show you them."

She ran down an intersecting way, we following; came out of it upon a little ledge close to the brink, three feet or more I suppose above it. The Golden Girl's voice rang out in a high-pitched, tremulous, throbbing call.

The lake of jewels stirred as though a breeze had passed over it; stirred, shook a shimmering torrent of shining flowers down upon us! She called again, the movement of the breeze became more rapid. The gem blooms streamed closer, closer, wavering, shifting, winding—at our very feet. Above them hovered a little radiant mist; a faint, oddly disturbing perfume wafted up, checking subtly the heart beat. The Golden Girl leaned over; called softly, and up from the sparkling mass shot a green vine whose heads were five flowers of flaming ruby. It shot up, flew into her hand and coiled about the white arm, its quintette of lambent blossoms—regarding us!

It was the thing Lakla had called the *Yekta;* that with which she had threatened the priestess; the thing that carried the dread of death. And the Golden Girl was handling it like a rose!

I gasped, Larry swore—I looked at it more closely. It was a hydroid, a development of that strange animal-vegetable that sometimes almost microscopic, waves in the sea depths like a cluster of flowers paralyzing its prey with the mysterious force that dwells in its blossom heads!

"Put it down, Lakla." The distress in O'Keefe's voice was deep. Lakla laughed mischievously, caught the real fear for

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her in his eyes; opened her hand, gave another faint call—and back it flew to its fellows.

"Why, it wouldn't hurt me, Larry!" she expostulated. "I feed them—the Yekta."

"I don't like it," he said hoarsely.

She sighed, gave another sweet, prolonged call. The lake of gems—rubies and amethysts, mauves and scarlet-tinged blues—wavered and shook even as it had before, and swept swiftly back to that place whence she had drawn them!

Then with Larry and Lakla walking ahead, white arm about his brown neck; the O'Keefe still expostulating, the handmaiden laughing merrily, we passed to the domed castle.

Glancing through a cleft I caught sight again of the far end of the bridge; noted among the clustered figures of the garrison a movement, a flashing of green fire like marsh-lights on spear tips; wondered idly what it was. And then, other thoughts crowding in, I followed along, head bent, behind the pair who had found in what was Olaf's hell, their true paradise.

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE LAND OF THE DWELLER

"NEVER was there such a girl!" Thus Larry, dreamily, leaning head in hand on one of the wide divans of the chamber where Lakla had left us, pleading service to the Silent Ones.

"An', by the faith and the honor of the O'Keefes, an' by my dead mother's soul may God do with me as I do by her!" he whispered fervently.

I told him what Rador had revealed to me regarding the handmaiden and her origin. He nodded, showing no surprise whatever.

"Sure," he said. "It's as I told you. The Silent Ones are of the *Tuatha De*, an' they send to Ireland for the colleens. They won't have anything to do with the crowd here. Lakla's Irish—no doubt of it. Maybe she comes from one of the fairy hills, or maybe the handmaidens come straight from Tir n'Og. One of my own ancestors married a girl of the green people, an' the O'Keefes have long been kin to the *Sidh*. That's why the banshee is so faithful. Why not, when she's one of the family?"

He considered.

"They probably bring them in as changelings," he decided. "They do that in Ireland to this day. An' if she thinks her frogs are beautiful, why beautiful they are! An' if she wants to take 'em with her, why, by the *Lia Fail*, take 'em she shall. Even if every circus man in the United Kingdom complains to the king that we're ruinin' the business!"

He relapsed into open-eyed dreaming.

I walked about the room, examining it. It was the first opportunity I had gained to inspect carefully any of the rooms in the abode of the Three. It was octagonal, carpeted with the thick rugs that seemed almost as though woven of soft mineral wool, faintly shimmering, palest blue. I paced its diagonal; it was fifty yards; the ceiling was arched, and either of pale rose metal or metallic covering. The ceiling collected the light from the high, slitted windows, and shed it, diffused, through the room.

Around the octagon ran a low gallery not two feet from the floor, balustraded with slender pillars, close set; broken at opposite curtained entrances over which hung thick, dull-gold curtainings giving the same suggestion of metallic or mineral substance as the rugs. Set within each of the eight sides, above the balcony, were colossal slabs of lapis lazuli, inset with graceful but unplaceable designs in scarlet and sapphire blue.

There was the great divan on which mused Larry; two smaller ones; half a dozen low seats and chairs carved apparently of ivory and of dull soft gold. Touching these I found that they gave an impression of warmth, indeed of living warmth, as though they were infused with a slow, mild electric current. Or rather as though one touched a warm hand, so full of vitality was the sensation communicated.

Most curious were tripods, strong, pike-like legs of gold metal four feet high, holding small circles of the lapis intagliated with one curious symbol somewhat resembling the ideographs of the Chinese.

There was no dust. Nowhere in these caverned spaces had I found this constant companion of ours in the world overhead. My eyes caught a sparkle from a corner. Pursuing it, I found upon one of the low seats a flat, clear crystal oval, remarkably like a lens. I took it and stepped up on the balcony. Standing on tiptoe I found I commanded from the bottom of a window slit a view of the bridge approach. Scanning it I could see no trace of the garrison here, nor of the green spear flashes. I placed the crystal to my eyes, and with

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a disconcerting abruptness the cavern mouth leaped before me, apparently not a hundred feet away. Decidedly the crystal was a very excellent lens. But where were the guards?

I peered closely. Nothing! But now against the aperture I saw a score or more of tiny, dancing sparks. An optical illusion, I thought, and turned the crystal in another direction. There were no sparklings there. I turned it back again, and there they were. And what were they like? Realization came to me—they were like the little dancing, radiant atoms that had played for a time about the emptiness where had stood Songar of the Lower Waters before he had been shaken into the nothingness! And that green light I had noticed—the *Keth!*

A cry on my lips, I turned to Larry, and the cry died as the heavy curtainings at the entrance on my right undulated. They parted then as though a body had slipped through. Shook and parted again and again, with the dreadful passing of unseen things!

"Larry!" I cried. "Here! Quick!"

He leaped to his feet, gazed about wildly, and disappeared! Yes—vanished from my sight like the snuffed flame of a candle or as though something moving with the speed of light itself had snatched him away!

Then from the divan came the sounds of struggle, the hissing of straining breaths, the noise of Larry cursing. The pillows flew about as though the raging ghosts of a pair of panthers were tossing them. I leaped over the balustrade, drawing my own pistol. I was caught in a pair of mighty arms, my elbows crushed to my sides, drawn down until my face pressed close against a broad, hairy breast. And through that obstacle—formless, shadowless, transparent as air itself—I could still see the battle on the divan!

Now there were two sharp reports; the struggle abruptly ceased. From a point not a foot over the great couch, as though oozing from the air itself, blood began to drop, faster and ever faster, pouring out of nothingness.

And out of that same air, now a dozen feet away, leaped the face of Larry—bodyless, poised six feet above the floor, blazing with rage—floating weirdly, uncannily, to a hideous degree, in vacancy.

His hands flashed out. Armless, they wavered, appearing, disappearing—swiftly tearing something from him. Then there, feet hidden, stiff on legs that vanished at the ankles, striking out into vision with all the dizzy abruptness with which he had been stricken from sight, was the O'Keefe, a smoking pistol in hand.

And ever that red stream trickled out of vacancy and spread over the couch, dripping to the floor.

I MADE a mighty movement to escape; I was held more firmly. And then close to the face of Larry, flashing out with that terrifying instantaneousness even as had his, was the head of Yolara, as devilishly mocking as I had ever seen it. The cruelty shone through it like delicate white flames from hell—and beautiful!

"Stir not! Strike not, until I command!" She flung the words behind her, addressed to the invisible ones who had accompanied her, whose presences I sensed filling the chamber. The floating, beautiful head, crowned high with corn-silk hair, darted toward the Irishman. He took a swift step backward. The gray eyes of the priestess deepened toward purple, sparkled with malice.

"So," she said. "So, Larree—you thought you could go from me so easily!" She laughed softly. "In my hidden hand I hold the *Keth* cone," she murmured. "Before you can raise the death tube I can smite you—and will. And consider, Larree, if the handmaiden, the *choya* comes, I can vanish, so"—the mocking head disappeared, burst forth again—"and slay her with the *Keth*. Or bid my people seize her and bear her to the Shining One! And anger me not too much, Larree, else may I grow wroth and let the *Keth* loose upon you, come what may," she ended darkly.

I saw tiny beads of sweat stand out on O'Keefe's forehead, and knew he was thinking not of himself, but of Lakla.

"What do you want with me, Yolara?" he asked hoarsely.

"Nay," came the mocking voice. "Not Yolara to you, Larree. Call me by those sweet names you taught me. Honey of the Wild Bee-e-s, Net of Hearts—" Again her laughter tinkled.

"What do you want with me?" His voice was strained, the lips rigid.

"Ah, you are afraid, Larree." There was diabolic jubilation in the words. "What should I want but that you return with me? Why else did I creep through the lair of the dragon worm and pass the path of perils but to ask you that? And the *choya* guards you not well." Again she laughed. "We came to the cavern's end and there were her *Akka*. And the *Akka* can see us,

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as shadows. But it was my desire to surprise you with my coming, Larree." The voice was silken. "And I feared that they would hasten to be first to bring you that message to delight in your joy. And so, Larree, I loosed the *Keth* upon them—and gave them peace and rest within the nothingness. And the portal below was open, almost in welcome!"

Once more the malignant, silver pealing of her laughter.

"What do you want with me?" There was loathing in his eyes, but plainly he strove for control.

"Want!" the silver voice hissed, grew calm. "Do not Siya and Siyana grieve that the rite I pledged them is but half done? And do they not desire it finished? And am I not beautiful? More beautiful than your *choya?*"

The fiendishness died from the eyes; they grew blue, wondrous. The veil of invisibility slipped down from the neck, the shoulders, half revealing the gleaming breasts. And weird, weird beyond all telling was that exquisite head floating there in air. And beautiful, sinisterly beautiful beyond all telling, too. So even might Lilith, the serpent woman, have shown herself tempting Adam!

"And perhaps," she said; "perhaps I want you because I hate you. Perhaps because I love you. Or perhaps for Lugur or perhaps for the Shining One."

"And if I go with you?" He said it quietly.

"Then shall I spare the handmaiden, and—who knows?—take back my armies that even now gather at the portal and let the Silent Ones rot in peace in their abode, from which they had no power to keep me," she added venomously.

"You will swear that, Yolara; swear to go without harming the handmaiden?" he asked eagerly. The little devils danced in her eyes. I wrenched my face from the smothering contact.

"Don't trust her, Larry!" I cried. And again the grip choked me.

"Is that devil in front of you or behind you, old man?" he asked quietly, eyes never leaving the priestess. "If he's in front I'll take a chance and wing him, and then you scoot and warn Lakla."

But I could not answer; nor, remembering Yolara's threat, would I had I been able.

"Decide quickly!" There was cold threat in her voice. And then—

The curtains toward which O'Keefe had slowly, step by step, drawn close, opened. They framed the handmaiden! The face of Yolara changed into that gorgon mask that had transformed it once before at sight of the Golden Girl. In her blind rage she forgot to cast the occulting veil. Her hand darted like a snake out of the folds; poising itself with the little silver cone aimed at Lakla.

But before it was wholly poised, before the priestess could loose its force, the handmaiden was upon her. Swift as the lithe white wolf hound she leaped, and one slender hand gripped Yolara's throat, the other the wrist that lifted the quivering death; white limbs wrapped about the hidden ones. I saw the golden head bend, the hand that held the *Keth* swept up with a vicious jerk; saw Lakla's teeth sink into the wrist—the blood spurt forth and heard the priestess shriek. The cone fell, bounded toward me; with all my strength I wrenched free the hand that held my pistol, thrust it agains the pressing breast and fired.

The clasp upon me relaxed; a red rain stained me; at my feet a little pillar of blood jetted. A hand thrust itself from nothingness, clawed, and was still.

Now Yolara was down, Lakla meshed in her writhings and fighting like some wild mother whose babes are serpent menaced. Over the two of them, astride, stood the O'Keefe, a pike from one of the high tripods in his hand—thrusting, parrying, beating on every side as with a broadsword against poniard-clutching hands that thrust themselves out of vacancy striving to strike him; stepping here and there, always covering, protecting Lakla with his own body even as a caveman of old who does battle with his mate for their lives.

The sword-club struck, and on the floor lay the half body of a dwarf, writhing with vanishments and reappearings of legs and arms. Beside him lay the shattered tripod from which Larry had wrenched his weapon. I flung myself upon it, dashed it down to break loose one of the remaining supports, struck in midfall one of the unseen even as his dagger darted toward me! The seat splintered, leaving in my clutch a golden bar. I jumped to Larry's side, guarding his back, whirling it like a staff; felt it crunch once—twice—through unseen bone and muscle.

AT THE door was a booming. Into the chamber rushed a dozen of the frog men. While some guarded the entrances, others leaped straight to us, and form-

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ing a circle about us, began to strike with talons and spurs at unseen things that screamed and sought to escape. Now here and there about the blue rugs great stains of blood appeared; heads of dwarfs, torn arms and gashed bodies, half occulted, half revealed.

And at last the priestess lay silent, vanquished, white body gleaming with that uncanny—fragmentariness—from her torn robes. The O'Keefe reached down, drew Lakla from her. Shakily, Yolara rose to her feet, panting, the hatred in her eyes, the hellish mask of her face no whit softened. The handmaiden, face still blazing with wrath, stepped before her; with difficulty she steadied her voice.

"Yolara," she said, "you have defied the Silent Ones, you have desecrated their abode, you came to slay these men who are the guests of the Silent Ones and me, who am their handmaiden. Why did you do these things?"

"I came for him!" gasped the priestess; she pointed to O'Keefe.

"Why?" asked Lakla.

"Because he is pledged to me," replied Yolara, all the devils that were hers in her face. "Because he wooed me! Because he is mine!"

"That is a lie!" The handmaiden's voice shook with rage. "It is a lie! But here and now he shall choose, Yolara. And if you he chooses, you and he shall go forth from here unmolested. For, Yolara, it is his happiness that I most desire, and if you are that happiness—you shall go together. And now, Larry, choose!"

Swiftly she stepped beside the priestess; swiftly wrenched the last shreds of the hiding robes from her.

There they stood—Yolara a serpent woman, and wonderful, too. Beyond the dreams even of Phidias—and hell fire glowing from the purple eyes.

And Lakla, like a girl of the Vikings, like one of those warrior maids who stood and fought for dun and babes at the side of those old heroes of Larry's own green isle; translucent ivory lambent through the rents of her torn draperies, and in the wide, golden eyes flaming wrath, indeed—not the diabolic flames of the priestess but the righteous wrath of some soul that looking out of paradise sees vile wrong in the doing.

The O'Keefe's voice was subdued, hurt. "There is no choice. I love you, Lakla, and only you, and have from the moment I saw you. It's not easy, this. God, Goodwin, I feel like an utter cad," he flashed at me. "There is no choice, Lakla," he ended, eyes steady upon hers.

The priestess's face grew deadlier still.

"What will you do with me?" she asked.

"Keep you," I said, "as hostage."

O'Keefe was silent; the Golden Girl shook her head.

"Well would I like to." Her face grew dreaming. "But the Silent Ones say no. They bid me let you go, Yolara."

"The Silent Ones," the priestess laughed. "You, Lakla, I surmise. You fear, perhaps, to let me tarry here too close!"

Storm gathered again in the handmaiden's eyes; she forced it back.

"No," she answered, "the Silent Ones so command, and for their own purposes. Yet do I think, Yolara, that you will have little time to feed your wickedness—tell that to Lugur—and to your Shining One!" she added slowly.

Mockery and disbelief rode high in the priestess's pose. "Am I to return alone, like this?" she asked.

"Nay, Yolara, nay; you shall be accompanied," said Lakla. "And by those who will guard, and watch you well. They are here even now."

The hangings parted, and into the chamber came Olaf and Rador—and paused in blank amazement.

"You traitor!" hissed the priestess to the green dwarf. "Be sure that you shall not dance with the Shining One!"

He gazed at her, face stern, immovable; listened to Lakla's swift explanation.

"She shall be guarded—well!" was all he said. The priestess bit her lips, turned and met the fierce hatred and contempt in the eyes of the Norseman—and for the first time lost her bravado.

"Let not *him* go with me," she gasped. Her eyes searched the floor frantically.

"He goes with you," said Lakla, and threw about Yolara a swathing that covered the exquisite, alluring body. "And you shall pass through the Portal, not sulk along the path of the worm!"

She bent to Rador, whispered to him. He nodded; she had told him, I supposed, the secret of its opening.

"Come," he said, and with the ice-eyed giant behind her, Yolara, head bent, passed out of those hangings through which, but a little before, unseen, triumph in her grasp, she had slipped.

THEN Lakla came to the unhappy O'Keefe, rested her hands on his shoulders, looked deep into his eyes.

"*Did* you woo her, even as she said?"

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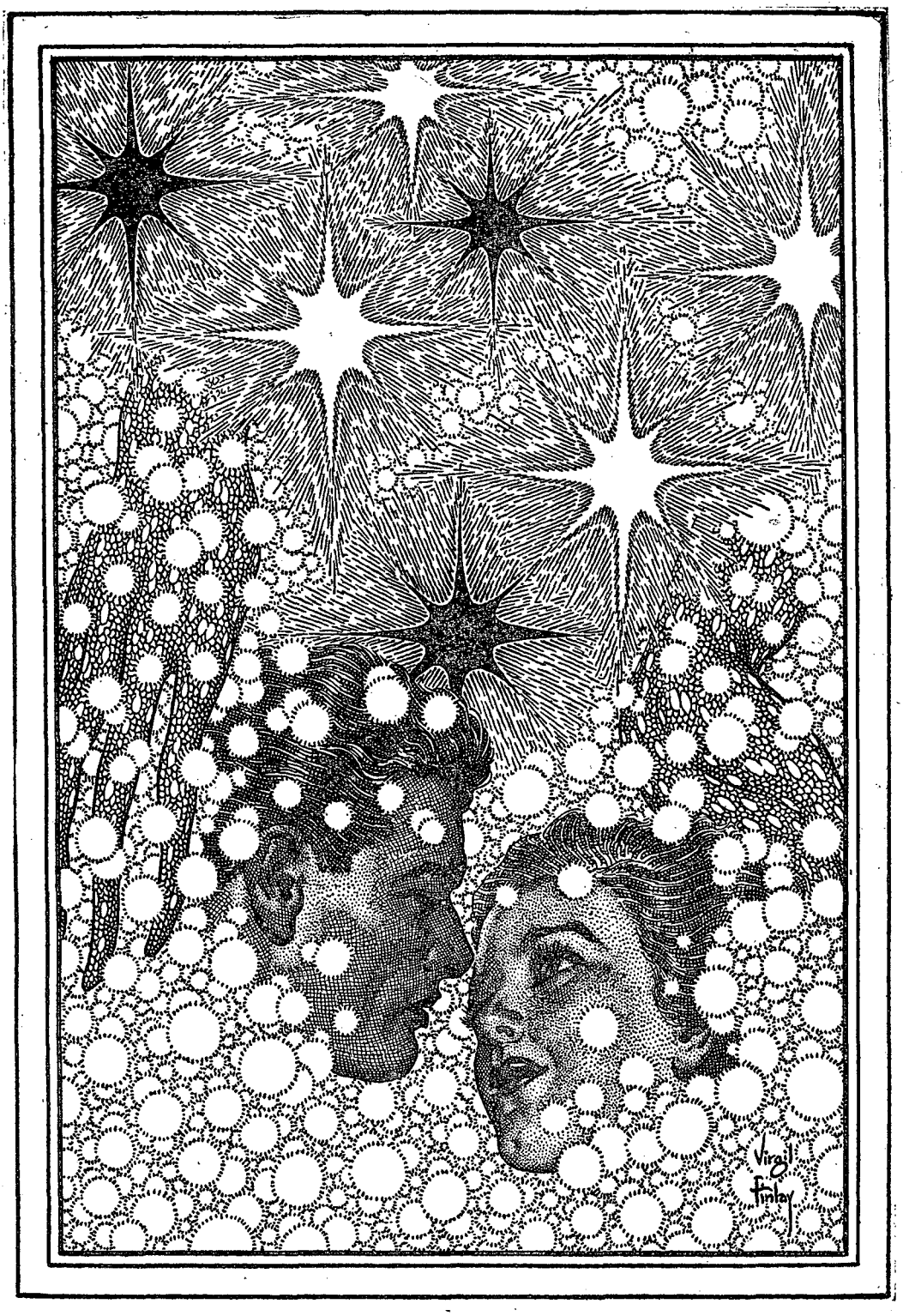

Out from the sparkling mists stretched two hands, enormously long, utterly unhuman. . . .

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The Irishman flushed miserably.

"I did not," he said. "I was pleasant to her, of course, because I thought it would bring me quicker to you, darlin'."

She looked at him doubtfully; then—

"I think you must have been very—pleasant!" was all she said. And leaning toward him, she kissed him forgivingly straight on the lips.

An extremely direct maiden was Lakla, with a truly sovereign contempt for anything she might consider non-essential. At this moment I decided she was wiser even than I had thought her.

She called, and to her came the frog woman who was her attendant. To her the handmaiden spoke, pointing to the batracians who stood, paws and forearms melted beneath the robes of invisibility they had gathered. She took them and passed out—more grotesque than ever, shattering into streaks of vacancies, reappearing with flickers of shining scale and yellow gems as the torn pennants of invisibility fluttered about her.

The frog-men reached down, swung each a dead dwarf in his arms, and filed, booming, away.

And feeling in my pocket, I drew out a little silver cone, caught and slipped there by me unconsciously as it rolled from Yolara's hand—and knew then for what her mad eyes had been searching.

Decidedly the priestess's visit had added to our weapons, no matter how unpleasant her call had been.

WE HAD watched, Larry and I, the frog-men throw the bodies of Yolara's assassins into the crimson waters. As vultures swooped down upon the dying, there came sailing swiftly to where the dead men floated dozens of the luminous globes.

Their slender, varicolored tentacles whipped out; the giant iridescent bubbles climbed over the cadavers. And as they touched them there was the swift dissolution, the melting away into putrescence of flesh and bone that I had witnessed when the dart touched fruit that time I had saved Rador. And upon this the *Medusae* gorged; pulsing lambently; their wondrous colors shifting, changing, glowing stronger. Elfin moons now indeed, but satellites whose glimmering beauty was fed by death; alembics of enchantment whose glorious hues were sucked from horror.

Sick, I turned away. O'Keefe was as pale as I. We passed back into the corridor that had opened on the ledge from which we had watched; met Lakla hurrying toward us. Before she could speak there throbbed faintly about us a vast sighing. It grew into a murmur, a whispering, shook us. Then passing like a presence, it died away in far distance.

"The Portal has opened," said the handmaiden. And a fainter sighing, like an echo of the other, mourned about us. "Yolara is gone," she said, "the Portal is closed. Now must we hasten. For the Three have ordered that you, Goodwin, and Larry and I go upon that strange road of which I have spoken, and which Olaf may not take lest his heart break. And we must return ere he and Rador cross the bridge."

Her hand sought Larry's; we passed down to a chamber in which stood a table, bearing one of the crystal ewers and goblets. From the former she poured a ruddy liquid; held a glass to me. Mischievously she kissed the lip of that she reached to Larry, and turning it he drank from the spot her mouth had touched. A weariness that I had not known was in me vanished away as I drank. I felt fortified, alert, eager—and in the O'Keefe's brightening eyes I read that he, too, had drawn to himself new force.

"Drink deep," said the handmaiden, and poured the goblet full again. "The road is strange, indeed, even to me who have followed it often. You will need all your strength to hold you steady upon it!"

But now, quaffing that second glass, I felt that there was no road that I could not travel.

"Come!" said Lakla, and we walked on: down and down through hall after hall, flight upon flight of stairways. Deep, deep indeed we must be beneath the domed castle. Lakla paused before a curved, smooth breast of the crimson stone rounding gently into the passage. She pressed its side; it revolved; we entered it; it closed behind us.

The room, the—hollow—in which we stood was faceted like a diamond; and like a cut brilliant, its sides glistened—though dully. Its shape was a deep oval, and our path dropped down to a circular, polished base, roughly two yards in diameter. Glancing behind me I saw that in the closing of the entrance there had been left no trace of it save the steps that led to where that entrance had been. And as I looked these steps *turned,* leaving us isolated upon the circle, only the faceted walls about us. And in each of the gleaming facets the three of us reflected—dimly. It was as

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though we were within a diamond egg whose graven angles had been turned *inward*.

But the oval was not perfect; at my right a screen cut it—a screen that gleamed with fugitive, fleeting luminescences—stretching from the side of our standing place up to the tip of the chamber; slightly convex and criss-crossed by millions of fine lines like those upon a spectroscopic plate. But with this difference—that within each line I felt the presence of multitudes of finer lines, dwindling into infinitude, ultra-miscroscopic, traced by some instrument compared to whose delicacy our finest tool would be as a crowbar to the needle of the micrometer.

A foot or two from it stood something like the standee of a compass, bearing, like it, a cradled dial under whose crystal ran concentric rings of prisoned, lambent vapors, faintly blue. From the edge of the dial jutted a little shelf of crystal, a keyboard, in which were cut eight small cups.

Within these cups the handmaiden placed her tapering fingers. She gazed down upon the disk; pressed a digit, and the screen behind us slipped noiselessly into another angle.

"Put your arm around my waist, Larry, darlin', and stand close," she murmured. "You, Goodwin, place your arm over my shoulder."

Wondering, I did as she bade; she pressed other fingers upon the shelf's indentations. Three of the rings of vapor spun into intense light; raced around each other. From the screen behind us grew a radiance that held within itself all spectrums—not only those seen, but those unseen by man's eyes. It waxed and waxed, brilliant and ever more brilliant, all suffusing, passing through me as day streams through a window pane!

The enclosing facets burst into a blaze of coruscations, and in each sparkling panel I saw our image, shaken and torn like pennants in a whirlwind. I turned to look, was stopped by the handmaiden's swift command: "Turn not, on your life!"

The radiance behind me grew; was a rushing tempest of light in which I was but the shadow of a shadow. I heard, but not with my ears—nay, with mind itself—a vast roaring. An ordered tumult of sound that came hurling from the outposts of space; approaching—rushing—hurricane out of the heart of the cosmos—closer, closer. It wrapped itself about us with unearthly mighty arms.

And brilliant, even more brilliant, streamed the radiance right through us.

The faceted walls dimmed; in front of me they melted, diaphanously, like a gelatinous wall in a blast of flame. Through their vanishing, under the torrent of driving light, the unthinkable, impalpable tornado, I began to move, slowly—then ever more swiftly!

Still the roaring grew; the radiance streamed. Ever faster we went. Cutting down through the length, the *extension* of me, dropped a wall of rock, forshortened, clenched close. I caught a glimpse of the elfin gardens; they whirled, contracted, dwindled into a thin—*slice*—of color that was a part of me. Another wall of rock shrunk into a thin wedge through which I flew, and that at once took its place within me, like a card slipped beside those others!

Flashing around me, and from Lakla and O'Keefe, were nimbuses of flickering scarlet flames. And always the same steady hurling forward, appallingly mechanical.

ANOTHER barrier of rock, a gleam of white waters incorporating themselves into my—*drawing out*—even as were the flowered moss lands, the slicing, rocky wall—still another rampart of cliff, dwindling instantly into the vertical plane of those others. Our flight checked; we seemed to hover within, then to sway onward slowly, cautiously.

A mist danced ahead of me, a mist that grew steadily thinner. We stopped, wavered. The mist cleared.

I looked out into translucent, green distances; shot with swift, prismatic gleamings; waves and pulsings of luminosity like midday sun glow through green, tropic waters; dancing, scintillating veils of sparkling atoms that flew, hither and yon.

And Lakla and Larry and I were, I saw, like shadow shapes upon a smooth breast of stone twenty feet or more above the surface of this place. A surface spangled with tiny white blossoms gleaming wanly through creeping veils of phophorescence like smoke of noon fire. We were shadows, and yet we had substance. We were incorporated with, a part of, the rock—and yet we were living flesh and blood. We stretched—nor will I qualify this—we stretched through mile upon mile of space that weirdly enough gave at one and the same time an absolute certainty of immense horizontal lengths and a vertical concentration that contained nothing of length, nothing of space whatever. We

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stood there upon the face of the stone, and still we were here within the faceted oval before the screen of radiance!

"Steady!" It was Lakla's voice, and not beside me there, but at my ear close before the screen. "Steady, Goodwin! And —see!"

The sparkling haze cleared. Enormous reaches stretched before me. Shimmering up through them, and as though growing in some medium thicker than air, was mass upon mass of verdure. Fruiting trees and trees laden with pale blossoms, arbors and bowers of pallid blooms, like that sea fruit of oblivion—grapes of Lethe—that cling to the tide-swept walls of the caverns of the Hebrides.

Through them, beyond them, around and about them, drifted and eddied a horde. Great as that with which Tamerlane swept down upon Rome, vast as the myriads which Genghis Khan had rolled upon the califs. Men and women and children, clothed in tatters, half nude and wholly naked. Slant-eyed Chinese, sloe-eyed Malays, islanders black and brown and yellow. Fierce-faced warriors of the Solomons with grizzled locks fantastically bedizened. Papuans, feline Javans, Dyaks of hill and shore; hook-nosed Phoenicians, Romans, straight-browed Greeks, and Vikings centuries beyond their lives. Scores of the black-haired Murians; white faces of our own Westerners—men and women and children—drifting, eddying. Each stamped with that mingled horror and rapture, eyes filled with ecstasy and terror entwined marked by God and devil in embrace—the seal of the Shining One—the dead-alive; the lost ones!

The loot of the Dweller!

Soul-sick, I gazed. They lifted to us visages of dread; they swept down toward us; glaring upward—a bank against which other and still other waves of faces rolled, were checked, paused. Until, as far as I could see—they were like billows piled upon an ever-growing barrier—they stretched beneath us, staring, staring!

Now there was a movement, far, far away; a concentrating of the lambency. The dead-alive swayed, oscillated, separated, forming a long lane against whose outskirts they crowded with avid, hungry insistence.

First only a luminous cloud, then a whirling pillar of splendors through the lane came—the Shining One. As it passed, the dead-alive swirled in its wake like leaves behind a whirlwind, eddying, twisting. And as the Dweller raced by them, brushing them with its spiralings and tentacles, they shone forth with unearthly, awesome gleamings—like vessels of alabaster in which wicks flare suddenly. And when it had passed they closed behind it, staring up at us once more.

The Dweller paused beneath us.

Out of the drifting ruck swam the body of Throckmartin! Throckmartin, my friend, to find whom I had gone to the pallid moon door; my friend whose call I had so laggardly followed. On his face was the Dweller's dreadful stamp; the lips were bloodless; the eyes were wide, lucent, something like pale phosphorescence gleaming within them—and soulless.

HE STARED straight up at me, unwinking, unrecognizing. Pressing against his side was a woman, young and gentle, and lovely—lovely even through the mask of horror and joy that lay upon her face. And her wide eyes, like Throckmartin's, gleamed with the lurking, unholy fires. She pressed against him closely; though the hordes kept up the faint churning, these two kept ever together, as though bound by unseen fetters.

And I knew the girl for Edith, his wife, who in vain effort to save him had cast herself into the Dweller's embrace!

"Throckmartin!" I cried. "Throckmartin! I'm here! Courage, man!"

Did he hear? I know now, of course, he could not.

But then I waited, hope striving to break through the nightmare hands that gripped my heart.

Their wide eyes never left me. There was another movement about them, others pushed past them; they drifted back, swaying, eddying—and still staring were lost in the awful throng.

Vainly I strained my gaze to find them again, to force some sign of recognition, some awakening of the clean life we know from them. But they were gone. Try as I would I could not see them—nor Stanton and the northern woman named Thora who had been the first of that tragic party to be taken by the Dweller.

"Throckmartin!" I cried again, despairingly. My tears blinded me.

I felt Lakla's light touch.

"Steady," she commanded, pityingly. "Steady, Goodwin. You cannot help them now! Steady and—watch!"

Below us the Shining One had paused—spiraling, swirling, vibrant with all its transcendent, devilish beauty; had paused and was contemplating us. Now I could see

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clearly that nucleus, that core shot through with flashing veins of radiance, that ever-shifting shape of glory through the shroudings of shimmering, misty plumes, throbbing lacy opalescenses, vaporous spiralings of prismatic fantom fires.

Steady over it hung the seven little moons of amethyst, of saffron, of emerald and azure and silver, or rose of life and moon white. They poised themselves like a diadem — calm, serene, immobile — and down from them into the Dweller, piercing plumes and swirls and spirals, ran countless tiny strands, radiations, finer than the finest spun thread of spider's web, gleaming filaments through which seemed to run—power—from the seven globes. Like—yes, that was it—miniatures of the seven torrents of moon flame that poured through the septichromatic, high crystals in the Moon Pool's chamber roof.

Swam out of the coruscating haze the Dweller's—face!

Both of man and woman it was, like some ancient, androgynous deity of Etruscan fanes long dust, and yet neither woman nor man. Human and inhuman; seraphic and sinister; benign and malefic—and still no more of these four than is flame, which is beautiful whether it warms or devours, or wind whether it feathers the trees or shatters them, or the wave which is wondrous whether it caresses or kills.

Subtly, undefinably it was of our world and of one not ours. Its lineaments flowed from another sphere, took fleeting familiar form, and as swiftly withdrew whence they had come. Something amorphous, unearthly—as of unknown, unheeding, unseen gods rushing through the depths of star-hung space; and still of our own earth, with the very soul of earth peering out from it, caught within it—and in some—unholy—way debased.

It had eyes. Eyes that were now shadows darkening within its luminosity like veils falling, and falling, opening windows into the unknowable; deepening into softly glowing blue pools, blue as the Moon Pool itself; then flashing out, and this only when the—face—bore its most human resemblance, into twin stars large almost as the crown of little moons; and with that same baffling suggestion of peep-holes into a world untrodden, alien, perilous to man!

And once more the tempest of mingled terror and joy, of ineffable yearning to leap into the radiant folds, of insupportable urge to flee from them that Throckmartin had described, and that I had felt one time before had swept through me.

"Steady!" came Lakla's voice; her body leaned against mine.

I gripped myself, my brain steadied, I looked again. And I saw that of body, at least body as we know it, the Shining One had none. Nothing but the throbbing, pulsing core streaked with lightning veins of rainbows; and around this, never still, sheathing it, the swirling, glorious veilings of its hell and heaven born radiance.

So the Dweller stood—and gazed.

Then up toward us swept a reaching, questing spiral!

Under my hand Lakla's shoulder quivered; dead-alive and their master vanished. I danced, flickered, *within* the rock; felt a swift sense of shrinking, of withdrawal; slice upon slice the carded walls of stone, of silvery waters, of elfin gardens slipped from me as cards are withdrawn from a pack; one by one—slipped, wheeled, flattened and lengthened out as I passed through them and they passed from me.

Gasping, shaken, weak, I stood *all* within the faceted oval chamber; arm still about the handmaiden's white shoulder; Larry's hand still clutching her girdle.

The roaring, impalpable gale from the cosmos was retreating to the outposts of space—was still; the intense, streaming, flooding radiance lessened—died.

"Now have you beheld," said Lakla, "and well you trod the road. And now shall you hear, even as the Silent Ones have commanded, what the Shining One is—and how it came to be."

The steps flashed back; the doorway into the chamber opened.

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE BEGINNING

LARRY and I followed Lakla into the chamber. It was her own boudoir, if so I may call it. Smaller than any of the other chambers of the domed castle in which I had been, its intimacy was revealed not only by its faint fragrance but by its high mirrors of polished silver and various oddly wrought articles of the feminine toilet that lay here and there; things I afterward knew to be the work of the artisans of the *Akka*—and no mean metal workers were they.

One of the window slits dropped almost to the floor, and at its base was a wide, comfortably cushioned seat commanding a view of the bridge and of the cavern ledge. To it the handmaiden beck-

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oned us; sank upon it, drew Larry down beside her and, smiling witchingly, motioned me to sit close to him.

"Now this," she said, "is what the Silent Ones have commanded me to tell you two: To you, Larry, that knowing, you may weigh all things in your mind and answer as your spirit bids you a question that the Three will ask. And what that is I know not," she murmured. "And I, they say, must answer, too—and it—frightens me!"

The great golden eyes widened; darkened with dread. She sighed, shook her head impatiently, leaned over toward me.

"And to you, Goodwin," she went on, "that you may understand; and understanding carry to your own world, if so it be that you attain it, a new wisdom and a warning. And be not afraid, they say, to speak, for what they utter through me is truth. Truth more eternal than that sun of yours which I so long to see, and may, perhaps, never behold—" She paused wistfully.

"Not like us, and never like us," she spoke low, wonderingly, "the Silent Ones say were they. Nor were those from which they sprang like those from which we have come. Although like these last they were born, lived and died; and like us now they live and die. But they pass only when they will it! Ancient, ancient beyond thought are the *Taithu,* the race of the Silent Ones. Far, far below this place where now we sit, close to earth heart itself were they born. And there they dwelt for time upon time, *laya* upon *laya* upon *laya,* with others, not like them, some of which have vanished time upon time agone, others that still dwelt in their—cradle.

"It is hard"—she hesitated—"hard to tell this, that slips through my mind because I know so little that even as the Three told it to me, it passed from me for lack of place to stand upon," she went on, quaintly. "Something there was of time when earth and sun were but cold mists in the—the heavens. Something of these mists drawing together, whirling, whirling, faster and faster. Drawing as they whirled more and more of the mists—growing larger, growing warm—forming at last into the globes they are, with others spinning around the sun.

"Something, too, of regions within this globe where vast fire was prisoned, and bursting forth tore and rent the young orb. Of one such bursting forth that sent what you call moon flying out to company us and left behind those spaces whence we now dwell—and of—of life particles that here and there below grew into the race of the Silent Ones, and those others. But not the *Akka* which, like you, they say came from above. And all this I do not understand. Do you, Goodwin?" she appealed to me.

I nodded—for what she had related so fragmentarily was in reality an excellent approach to the theory of a coalescing nebula contracting into the sun and its planets. And of the hurling out of the moon in a cataclysm of earth.

Here, too, was something of the theory of life starting on earth through the dropping upon portions favorable to their development of similar minute, life *spores,* propelled through space by the driving power of light and developing through the vast ages into man and every other living thing we know.

Nor was it incredible that in the ancient nebula that was the matrix of our solar system similar, or rather dissimilar particles in all but the subtle essence we call life, might have become entangled and, resisting every cataclysm as they had resisted the absolute zero of outer space, found in these caverned spaces their proper environment. Here they may have developed into the race of the Silent Ones and—only *they* could tell what else!

"I understand," I replied, "and although it is all very—marvelous—still, I believe."

The handmaiden's voice was now surer. "They say that in their cradle near earth heart they grew; grew untroubled by the turmoil and disorder which flayed the surface of this globe, although then they knew not that there was aught beside the place in which they dwelt. And they say it was a place of light and that strength came to them from earth heart—strength greater than you and those from which you sprang ever derived from sun.

"At last, ancient, ancient beyond all thought they say again, was this time when they began to know, to realize themselves. And wisdom came ever more swiftly. Up from their cradle, because they did not wish to dwell longer with those others, they came and found this place.

"When all the face of earth was covered with waters in which only tiny, hungry things that knew naught save hunger and its satisfaction, *they* had attained the wisdom that enabled them to make paths such as we have just traveled and to look out upon those waters! And *laya* upon *laya* thereafter, time upon time, they went upon the paths and watched the

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flood recede; saw great bare flats of steaming ooze appear on which crawled and splashed larger things which had grown from the tiny hungry ones; watched the flats rise higher and higher and green life begin to clothe them; saw mountains uplift and vanish.

"EVER the green life waxed and the things which crept and crawled grew greater and took over different forms; until at last came a time when the steaming mists lightened and the things which had begun as little more than tiny hungry mouths were huge and monstrous, so huge that the tallest of my *Akka* would not have reached the knee of the smallest of them.

"But in none of these was there realization of themselves, say the Three. Naught but hunger driving, always driving them to still its crying.

"So for time upon time the race of the Silent Ones took the paths no more, placing aside the half-thought that they had of making their way to earth face even as they had made their way from beside earth heart. They turned wholly to the seeking of wisdom, and after other time on time they attained that which killed even the faintest shadow of the half-thought.

For they crept far within the mysteries of life and death; they mastered the illusion of space; they lifted the veils of creation and of its twin, destruction. And they stripped the covering from the flaming jewel of truth. But when they had crept within those mysteries, they bid me tell you, Goodwin, they found ever other mysteries veiling the way. And after they had uncovered the jewel of truth, they found it to be a gem of infinite facets and therefore not wholly to be read before eternity's unthinkable end.

"And for this they were glad, because now throughout eternity might they and theirs pursue knowledge over ways illimitable.

"They conquered light—light that sprang at their bidding from the nothingness that gives birth to all things and in which all things that are, have been and shall be, lie. Light that streamed through their bodies cleansing them of all dross; light that was food and drink; light that carried their vision afar or bore to them images out of space opening many windows through which they gazed down upon life, on thousands upon thousands of the rushing worlds; light that was the flame of life itself and in which they bathed, ever renewing their own. They set radiant lamps within the stones and of black light they wove the sheltering shadows and the shadows that slay.

"Arose from this people those Three, the Silent Ones. They led them all in wisdom so that in the Three grew—pride. And the Three built them this place in which we sit and set the Portal in its place and withdrew from their kind to go alone into the mysteries and to map alone the facets of truth jewel.

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"Then there came here the ancestors of the *Akka;* tribes of them, not as they are now, and glowing but faintly within them the spark of—self-realization. And the *Taithu* seeing this, did not slay them. But they took the ancient, long untrodden paths and looked forth once more upon earth face. Now on the land were vast forests and a chaos of green life. On the shore things scaled and fanged, fought and devoured each other and in the green life moved bodies great and small that slew, and ran from those that would slay.

"They searched for the passage through which the *Akka* had come, and closed it. Then the Three took them and brought them here; and taught them and blew upon the spark until it burned ever stronger and stronger and in time they became much as they are now—my *Akka.*

"The Three took council after this and said, 'We have strengthened spirit in these until it has become articulate; shall we not *create* spirit?" Again she hesitated, her eyes rapt, dreaming; her gaze once more that of the pythoness through whom Apollo is whispering. "The Three are speaking," she murmured. "They have my tongue—"

"YES," she said, the golden voice vibrant, "the sin of pride was ours, and pride and wisdom such as ours are perilous, comrade, ye who are named Goodwin, and who also in your way pursue knowledge. We said that the spirit we would create should be of the spirit of life itself, speaking to us with the tongues of the far-flung stars, of the winds, of the wide waters and of all upon and within these.

"Upon that universal matrix of matter, that mother of all things that you name the ether, we labored. Think not that her wondrous fertility is limited by what ye see on earth or what has been on earth from its beginning. Infinite, infinite are the forms the mother bears and countless are the energies that are part of her.

"We have looked upon the strange blossoming orbs that circle the sun ye call Arcturus, the crystal-clear globes that girdle Betelgeuse, the fantom spheres that diadem Aldebaran, the worlds of cool misty flame that swims within that ye name the Pleiades, and upon others, countless, countless others and upon them all were the children of ether even as they themselves were her children.

"Watching we learned, and learning we formed that ye term the Dweller, that those without name—the Shining One. Within the Universal Mother we shaped it, to be a voice to tell us her secrets. A thing of glory to go before us lighting the mysteries, a guide and an interpreter. Out of the ether we fashioned it, giving it the soul of light that still ye know not nor perhaps ever may know, and with the essence of life that ye saw blossoming deep in the abyss and that is the pulse of earth heart we filled it. And we wrought with pain and with love, with yearning and with fierce, scorching pride and from our travail came the Shining One—our child!

"There is an energy beyond and above ether, a purposeful, sentient force that laps like an ocean the furthest-flung star, that transfuses all that ether bears, that sees and speaks and feels in us and in you, that is incorporate in beast and bird and reptile, in tree and grass and all living things, that sleeps in rock and stone, that finds sparkling tongue in jewel and stars and in all dwellers within the firmament. And this is what ye call consciousness!

"Your forefathers knew this when they worshiped spirits of wood and stream, of wave and torrent and mountain, of fire and air.

"We crowned the Shining One with the seven orbs of light which are the channels between it and the sentient flood we sought to make articulate, the portals through which flows its currents and so flowing, become choate, vocal, self-realizant within our child.

"But as we shaped, there passed some of the essences of our pride. In giving will we had given power, perforce, to exercise that will for good or for evil, to speak or to be silent, to tell us what we wished of that which poured into it through the seven orbs or to withhold that knowledge itself.

"And in forging it from the immortal *energies*, we had endowed it with their indifference. Open to all consciousness it held within it the pole of utter joy and the pole of utter woe with all the arc that lies between; all the ecstasies of the countless worlds and suns and all their sorrows. All that ye symbolize as gods and all ye symbolize as devils—not negativing each other, for there is no such thing as negation, but holding them together, balancing them, incompassing them, pole upon pole!"

So *this* was the explanation of the entwined emotions of joy and terror that

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had changed so appallingly Throckmartin's face and the faces of all the Dweller's slaves!

THE handmaiden's eyes grew bright, alert, again. The brooding passed from her face; the golden voice that had been so deep sought its own familiar pitch.

"I listened while the Three spoke to you," she said. "Now that shaping of the Shining One had been a long, long travail and time had flown over the world without, *laya* upon *laya*. For a space the Shining One was content to dwell here; to be fed with the foods of light; to open the eyes of the Three to mystery upon mystery and to read for them facet after facet of the gem of truth.

"Yet as the tides of consciousness flowed through it, they left behind shadowings and echoes of their burdens; and the Shining One grew stronger, always stronger *of itself within itself*. Its will strengthened and now not always was it the will of the Three; and the pride that was woven in the making of it waxed, while the love for them that its creators had set within it waned.

"Not ignorant were the *Taithu* of the work of the Three. First there were a few, then more and more who coveted the Shining One and who would have had the Three share with them the knowledge it drew in for them. But the Three, in their pride, would not.

"There came a time when its will was now *all* its own, and it rebelled, turning its gaze to the wider spaces beyond the Portal, offering itself to the many there who would serve it; tiring of the Three, their control and their abode.

"Now the Shining One has its limitations, even as we. Over water it can pass, through air and through fire; but pass it cannot through rock or metal. So it sent a message—how I know not—to the *Taithu* who desired it, whispering to them the secret of the Portal. And when the time was ripe they opened the Portal and the Shining One passed through it to them; nor would it return to the Three though they commanded, and when they would have forced it they found that it had hived and hidden a knowledge that they could not overcome.

"Yet by their arts the Three could have shattered the seven shining orbs and stilled its life, sending it back to that from which they had drawn it; but they would not because—they loved it!

"Those to whom it had gone built for it that place I have just shown you, and they bowed to it and drew wisdom from it. But ever they turned more and more from the ways in which the *Taithu* had walked, for it seemed that which came to the Shining One through the seven orbs had less and less of good and more and more of the power you call evil. Knowledge it gave and understanding, yes; but not that which, clear and serene, lights the paths of right wisdom. Rather were they flares pointing the dark roads that lead to—to the ultimate evil!

"Not all of the race of the Three followed the counsel of the Shining One. There were many, many, who would have none of it nor of its power and who saw clearly the peril threatening. So were the *Taithu* split; and in this place where there had been none, came hatred, fear and suspicion. Those who pursued the ancient ways went to the Three and pleaded with them to destroy their work—and they would not, for still they loved it; sitting lonely, mourning in their place like those from whom a best beloved has run.

"Stronger grew the Dweller's pride, darker its power and less and less did it lay before its worshipers—for now so they had become—the fruits of its knowledge. And it grew restless, turning its gaze upon earth face even as it had turned it from the Three. It whispered to the *Taithu* to take again the paths and look out upon the world. Lo! above them was no longer sea but a great fertile land on which dwelt an unfamiliar race, skilled in arts, seeking and finding wisdom—mankind! Mighty builders they were; vast were their cities and huge their temples of stone.

"They called their lands Muria and they worshiped a god Thanaroa whom they imagined to be the maker of all things, dwelling far away, careless, indifferent, as to the fate of his creations. They worshiped as closer gods, not indifferent but to be prayed to and to be propitiated, the moon and the sun. Two kings they had each with his council and his court. One was high priest to the moon and the other high priest to the sun.

"The mass of this people were black-haired, but the sun king and his nobles were ruddy with hair like mine; and the moon king and his followers were like Yolara—or Lugur. And this, the Three say, Goodwin, came about because for time upon time the law had been that whenever a ruddy-haired or ashen-tressed child was born of the black-haired it became dedicated at once to either sun god

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or moon god, later wedding and bearing children only to their own kind. Until at last from the blackhaired came no more of the light-locked ones, but the ruddy ones, being stronger, still arose from them."

She paused, running her long fingers through her own bronze-flecked ringlets.

"Above, far, far above the abode of the Shining One," she went on, "was their greatest temple, holding the shrines both of sun and moon. All about it were other temples hidden behind mighty walls, each enclosing its own space and squared and ruled and standing within a shallow lake; the sacred city, the city of the gods of this land."

It is the Nan-Matal that she is describing, I thought.

"OUT upon all this looked the *Taithu* who were now but the servants of the Shining One as it had been the messenger of the Three," Lakla said. "When they returned the Shining One spoke to them, promising them dominion over all that they had seen, yea, *under It* dominion of all earth itself and later perhaps of other earths. With all of mankind their slaves!

"In the Shining One had grown craft, cunning; knowledge to gain that which it desired. Therefore it told its *Taithu*—and mayhap told them truth—that not yet was it time for *them* to go forth. That slowly must they pass into that outer world for they had sprung from heart of earth and that even it, the Shining One itself, lacked power to swirl unaided into and through the above. Then it counseled them, instructing them what to do. They hollowed the chamber wherein I first saw you, cutting their way to it that path down which from it you sped.

"It revealed to them that the force that is within moon flame is kin to the force that is within the moon. For the chamber of its birth was the chamber, too, of moon birth and into it went the subtle essences and powers that flow in that earth child. And it taught them how to make that which fills what you call the Moon Pool whose opening is close behind its veil hanging upon the gleaming cliffs.

"When this was done it taught them how to make and how to place the seven lights through which moon flame streams into Moon Pool—the seven lights that are kin to its own seven orbs even as its fires are kin to moon fires—and which would open for it a path that it could tread. And all this the *Taithu* did, working so secretly that neither those of their race whose faces were set against the Shining One nor the busy men above knew aught of it.

"When it was done they moved up the path, clustering within the Moon Pool Chamber. Moon flame streamed through the seven globes, poured down upon the pool; they saw mists arise, embrace and become one with the moon flame. And then up through Moon Pool, drawn by the seven torrents, shaping itself within the mists of light, whirling, radiant—the Shining One!

"Almost free, almost loosed upon the world it coveted!

"Again it counseled them, and they pierced the passage whose portal you found first; set the fires within its stones that they might breathe of their light, and revealing themselves to the moon king and his priests spake to them even as the Shining One had instructed.

"Now was the moon king filled with fear and amaze when he looked upon the *Taithu*, shrouded with protecting mists of light in Moon Pool Chamber, and heard their words. Yet, being crafty, he thought of the power that would be his if he heeded and how quickly the strength of the sun king would dwindle. So he and his made a pact with the Shining One's messengers.

"When next the moon was round and poured its flames down upon Moon Pool, *Taithu* gathered there again, watched the child of the Three take shape within the pillars, speed away—and out! They heard a mighty shouting, a tumult of terror, of awe and of worship; a silence; a vast sighing. And they waited, wrapped in their mists of light, for they feared to follow nor were they near the paths that would have enabled them to look without.

"Another tumult—and back came the Shining One, murmuring with joy, pulsing, triumphant and clasped within its vapors a man and woman, ruddy-haired, golden-eyed, in whose faces rapture and horror lay side by side—gloriously, hideously. And still holding them it danced above the Moon Pool and—sank!

"Now must I be brief. *Lat* after *lat* that Shining One went forth, returning with its sacrifices. And stronger after each it grew, and gayer and more cruel. Ever when it passed with its prey toward the pool, the *Taithu* who watched felt a swift, strong intoxication, a drunkenness of spirit, streaming from it to them. And the Shining One forgot what it had promised them of dominion—and in this new evil delight they, too, forgot. And by this, more and

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more, they became its slaves, even as it had planned.

"Athirst for this poison the Shining One distilled from the flame of life within those it embraced, they built for it the great temple opposite the Veil where you watched it dance. Then here, by compact with the moon king, they carried throng upon throng of the black-haired, set them in the places beyond the green roadway and drew from them the brides and bridegrooms of that which had become their god; rejoicing in the soul drunkenness with which it flooded them when the Shining One took the offerings. Further, their god counseled them, so that the *Taithu* who would have washed away their evil could not prevail.

"The outer land was torn with hatred and open strife. The moon king and his kind, through the guidance of the evil *Taithu* and the favor of the Shining One, had become powerful and the sun king and his were darkened. And the moon priests preached that the child of the Three was the moon god itself come to dwell with them. Many believed, saying:

"'They can show us a god, but the sun king can show none. Further when he appears he warms our spirits with a fire that makes us even as gods. And does not the moon pass before the sun in the heavens and shadow him? Nor can the sun forbid it. Therefore shall we worship the moon god!'

"Yet were there many who hated the moon king and the ways of the Dweller. Battles there were and the whole land sickened. It was at this time that the evil *Taithu* set in place the pale stone whose keys are the moon rays and which you opened. They set it there that all who doubted might see the moon summon its spirit; but more than that to guard the Moon Pool against those whose doubts could not be stilled and who might creep in seeking to destroy. For only when the moon was full, all of its silver radiance streaming upon earth, could the Shining One draw strength to pass forth. At all other times it dwelt below; the Moon Pool Chamber was free of it, and bold, determined men might well enter, close its Portal and shatter the spheres of power.

"NOW suddenly vast tides arose and when they withdrew they took with them great portions of this country. And the land itself began to sink. Then said the moon king that the moon had called to ocean to destroy because wroth that another than he was worshipped. The people believed and there was wide slaughter. When it was over there was no more a sun king nor any of the ruddy-haired folk; slain were they, slain down to the babe at breast.

"But still the tides swept higher; still dwindled the land!

"As it shrank multitudes of the fleeing people were led through Moon Pool Chamber and carried here. They were what now are called the *ladala,* and they were given place and set to work; and they thrived. Came, too, many of the fair-haired; and they were given dwellings. They sat beside the evil *Taithu;* they became drunk even as they with the dancing of the Shining One; they learned—not all, only a little part but that little enough—of their arts. And ever the Shining One danced more gaily out there within the black amphitheater; grew ever stronger. And ever the hordes of its slaves behind the Veil increased.

"Nor did the *Taithu* who clung to the old ways check this. They could not. By the sinking of the land above, their own spaces were imperiled. Shattered mountains crashed through, and there were quakings as though its eternal walls strove to march upon each other. All of their strength and all of their wisdom it took to keep this land from perishing; nor had they help from those others mad for the poison of the Shining One. And they had no time to deal with them nor the earth race with whom they had foregathered.

"At last came a slow, vast tide. It rolled even to the bases of the walled islets of the city of the gods, and within these now were all that were left of my people on earth face.

"I am of those people." She paused, looking at me proudly. "One of the daughters of the sun king whose seed is still alive in the *ladala!*"

As Larry opened his mouth to speak she waved a silencing hand.

"This tide did not recede," she went on. "And after a time this remnant, the moon king leading them, joined those who had already fled below. The rocks became still, the quakings ceased and now those Ancient Ones who had been laboring could take breath. And anger grew within them as they looked upon the work of their evil kin. Again they sought the Three, and the Three now knew what they had done and their pride was humbled. They would not slay the Shining One themselves, for still they loved it. But they

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instructed these others how to undo their work; how also they might destroy the evil *Taithu* were it necessary.

"Armed with the wisdom of the Three they went forth, but now the Shining One was strong indeed. They could not slay it!

"Nay, it knew and was prepared; they could not even pass beyond its veil nor seal its abode. Ah, strong, strong, mighty of will, full of craft and cunning had the Shining One become. So they turned upon their kind who had gone astray and made them perish, to the last. The Shining One came not to the aid of its servants, though they called. For within its will was the thought that they were of no further use to it; that it would rest awhile and dance with them—who had so little of the power and wisdom of its *Taithu* and therefore no reins upon it. And while this was happening black-haired and fair-haired ran and hid and were but shaking vessels of terror.

"The Ancient Ones took council. This was their decision; that they would go from their gardens before the Silver Waters—leaving, since they could not kill it, the Shining One with its worshippers. They sealed the mouth of the passage that leads to the Moon Pool Chamber and they changed the face of the cliff so that none might tell where it had been. But the passage itself they left open, having foreknowledge I think, of a thing that was to come to pass in the far future—perhaps it was your journey here, my Larry and Goodwin—verily I think so.

"For the last time they went to the Three, to pass sentence upon them. They found them broken, their wisdom dulled with sorrow. And this was the doom they put upon the Three—that here they should remain, alone, among the *Akka*, served by them, until that time dawned when they would have strength and will to destroy the evil they had created—and even now—loved. Nor might they seek death, nor follow their judges until this had come to pass. This was the doom they put upon the Three for the wickedness that had sprung from their pride, and they strengthened it with their arts that it might not be broken.

"Then they passed—to a far land they had chosen where the Shining One could not go, beyond the black precipices of Doul that guard the place of wonders and are in turn guarded by the winged serpents, a green land—"

"Ireland!" interrupted Larry, with conviction. "I knew it."

"Since then time upon time had passed," she went on, unheeding. "The people called this place Muria after their sunken land and soon they forgot where was the portal the Taithu had sealed. The moon king became the Voice of the Dweller and always with the Voice is a beautiful woman of the moon king's kin who is its priestess. The Shining One is kinder to his priestess than to his Voice; and so really the woman rules. Long have they dwelt here and many have been the *ladala* who have danced—before the tiers of jet, upon the ivory dais, and passed in the Shining One's train over the Silvery Waters and through the Veil.

"And many have been the journeys upward of the Shining One, through the Moon Pool, returning with still others in its coils.

"Long has it watched the world swarm with man—and now again is it grown restless, longing for the wider spaces. It has spoken to Yolara and to Lugur even as it did to the dead *Taithu*, promising them dominion. And it has grown even stronger, drawing to itself power to go far on the moon stream where it wills from the Moon Pool Chamber. Thus was it able to seize your friend, Goodwin, and Olaf's wife and babe, and many more. Yolara and Lugur plan to open ways to earth face; to depart with their court and under the Shining One grasp the world!

"But now is the *va* about to strike when it will be settled whether the Shining One shall rule, or whether the Three shall destroy it!

"And this is the tale the Silent Ones bade me tell you—and it is done."

BREATHLESSLY I had listened to the stupendous epic of a long-lost world. Now I found speech to voice the question ever with me, the thing that lay as close to my heart as did the welfare of Larry. Indeed the whole object of my quest—the fate of Throckmartin and those who had passed with him into the Dweller's lair; yes, and of Olaf's wife, too.

"Lakla," I said, "the friend who drew me here and those he loved who preceded him—can we not save them?"

"I'll volunteer to go into that joint any minute and I'll bet I can get 'em," Larry's face was grim. "Lakla's been buffaloed like all the rest. Give me a hose or just make me one gas cylinder—and I'll get 'em out, don't doubt it."

He had spoken in English and the handmaiden had not understood.

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"Tell him what he wants to know, heart's delight," he spoke to her. "If you can," he added.

"The Three say no, Goodwin." There was again in her eyes the pity with which she had looked upon Olaf. "The Shining One—*feeds*—upon the flame of life itself, setting in its place its own fires and its own will. Its slaves are only shells through which it gleams. Death, say the Three, is the best that can come to them; yet will that be a boon great indeed."

"Gassed—let us get 'em away once, Doc, and we'll put up a fight to get 'em back all right," whispered O'Keefe.

"But they have souls, *mavourneen*," he said to her. "And they're alive still, in a way. Anyhow, Lakla, their souls have not gone."

"It was weeks before he passed that my friend Throckmartin was taken," I said. "How did he and his wife come together in the Dweller's lair?"

"I do not know," she answered, slowly. "You say they loved—and it is true that love is stronger even than death. By soul, Larry dear, you mean, I think that which is in us that lives forever. But I do not know. I only know that those whom the Shining One has taken live ever as you see them; fed by its own life, doing as it commands and in a measure partaking of its power. Whether their souls go far—or dwell there, being imperishable—when life fire has been eaten—I do not know."

"Lakla," I said, "this blight the Dweller puts upon what it touches—its power to eat what you call the fire of life—whence comes it?"

"From the time of the first sacrifice," she answered. "Before that its touch was clean. So, too, of the sounds that accompany it—you heard, like little bells of glass—whence they came I know not; but they were not there before the sacrifices and they, too, grow ever stronger as the Shining One—eats!"

"Can—er—Fireworks go wherever he pleases?" This was Larry. "If he can, why all that ceremony Goodwin and I watched when Olaf tried to do for him? And why the spot-light?"

"Spot-light?" she repeated, wonderingly.

"The path of radiant colors that swept over the Silvery Waters and through which the Shining One came," I interpreted.

"At the first that was necessary," she answered, "as the seven lights in the Moon Pool Chamber were; and still are, needed to open its path to the above. The *Taithu* made the light—but as the Child of the Three grew stronger it could pass beyond the Veil unaided, going where it willed about the land beyond the Portal. But the fair-haired clung to the forms, and as long as they gave their god all the brides and bridegrooms for whom it lusted, why should it wander?" she asked. "And then I have told you that the Shining One is cunning and has great wisdom. Perhaps it fears to affright too much those who serve it and feed it," she added.

"One thing I don't understand," Larry said, "is why a girl like you keeps coming out of the black-haired crowd; so frequently and one might say, so regularly, Lakla. Aren't there ever any redheaded boys, and if they are what becomes of them?"

"That, Larry, I cannot answer," she said, very frankly. "There was a pact of some kind; how made or by whom I know not. But for long the Murians feared the return of the *Taithu* and greatly they feared the Three. Even the Shining One feared those who had created it—for a time; and not even now is it eager to face them. That I know. Nor are Yolara and Lugur so sure. It may be that the Three commanded it; but how or why I know not. I only know that it is true. For here am I and from where else would I have come?"

"From Ireland," said Larry O'Keefe promptly. "And that's where you're going. For 'tis no place for a girl like you to have been brought up, Lakla. What with people like frogs, and a half god three-quarters devil, and red oceans, an' the only Irish things yourself and the Silent Ones up there, bless their hearts. It's no place for ye and by the soul of St. Patrick, it's out of it soon ye'll be gettin'!"

CHAPTER XVIII

"THE *Keth* HAS POWER"

LONG had been her tale in the telling, and too long, perhaps, have I been in the repeating. But not every day are the mists rolled away to reveal undreamed secrets of earth-youth.

Rising, I found I was painfully stiff—as muscle-bound as though I had actually trudged many miles. Larry, imitating me, gave an involuntary groan.

"Oh, but I'm sorry!" mourned Lakla, leaning over us. "I have forgotten—for those new to it the way is a weary one."

She ran to the doorway, whistled a clear high note down the passage.

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"Go you, Larry and Goodwin, with Kra and Gulk," the handmaiden said, "and let them minister to you. After, sleep a little —for not soon will Rador and Olaf return. And let me feel your lips before you go, Larry darlin'!" she added naïvely.

With enthusiasm he responded. She covered his eyes caressingly with her soft little palms; pushed him away.

"Now go," said Lakla, "and rest!"

How long I slumbered I do not know. A low and thunderous booming coming through the deep window slip, reverberated through the room and awakened me. Larry yawned; arose briskly; called over.

"I feel simply great!" he announced.

He had described my own sensations accurately, and I told him so.

"Sounds as though the bass drums of every jazz band in New York were serenading us!" he observed. Simultaneously we sprang to the window; raised ourselves; peered through.

I gasped.

We were just above the level of the bridge, and its full length was plain before us. Thousands upon thousands of the *Akka* were crowding upon it, and far away other hordes filled like a glittering thicket both sides of the cavern ledge's crescent strand. On black scale and orange scale the crimson light fell, picking them off in little flickering points. Yes, and upon scarlet and green and blue scale, too; for now I saw that, like the leopard frogs so familiar to us, the *Akka* possessed an extensive range of coloring.

And while all those who guarded the castle of the Three were uniformed in their Princeton armoring, these newcomers flaunted a bewildering variety of hues. At first I thought that Lakla had perhaps yielded to some feminine penchant for livery, but watching those nearest I saw that they were formed in squads and detachments, each under the command of one of the black and yellow batrachians. These latter, then, I presumed, had some special talent for leadership.

Within ordered lines of the *Akka* upon the platform from which sprang the smaller span over the abyss were Lakla, Olaf, and Rador; the handmaiden clearly acting as interpreter between them and the giant she had called Nak, the Frog King.

"Come on!" shouted Larry.

The passages were deserted, as we raced along.

Out of the open portal we ran; over the World Heart Bridge and straight into the group.

"Oh!" cried Lakla, "I didn't want you to wake up so soon, Larry darlin'!"

"Well, pulse of my heart, considering my delicate health and general fragility, would it hurt me, do you think, to be told what's going on?" he asked.

"Not at all, Larry!" answered the handmaiden serenely. "Yolara went through the Portal. She was very, very angry."

"She was all the devil's woman that she is!" rumbled Olaf.

"No word did she speak all the journey," said Rador, "until the Portal opened. Then said she to tell you, Larree, that both Lakla and you would pray her each to destroy either before she finished with both. If—" he hesitated—"if matters should go wrong, slay the handmaiden and yourself before Yolara can grip you!" he whispered.

O'Keefe nodded.

"Rador met the messenger," went on the Golden Girl calmly. "The *ladala* are ready to rise when Lugur and Yolara lead their hosts against us. They will strike at those left behind. And in the meantime we shall have disposed my *Akka* to meet Yolara's men. And on that disposal we must all take council, you, Larry, and Rador, Olaf and Goodwin and Nak, the ruler of the *Akka*."

"Did the messenger give any idea when Yolara expects to make her little call?" asked Larry.

"Yes," she answered. "They prepare, and we may expect them in—" She gave the equivalent of about thirty-six hours of our time.

"But, Lakla," I said, the doubt that I had long been holding finding voice, "should the Shining One come, with its slaves, are the Three strong enough to cope with it?"

There was troubled doubt in her own eyes.

"I do not know," she said at last.

"Now," said Larry, "two things I want to know. First—how many can Yolara muster against us; second, how many of these *Akka* have we to meet them? Never mind the *ladala*," he added. "This war's going to be won or lost on the western front."

Answering, Rador gave as the strength of Yolara's following what would be the equivalent of a hundred thousand with us; of the frog-men, roughly, two hundred and fifty thousand.

"Good enough," answered Larry. "Two to one. And they're some fighters."

"But, Larree," this was Rador, "do not

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forget that the nobles will have the quaking death and other things. Also that the soldiers have fought against the *Akka* before and will be shielded as far as possible against their spears and clubs. Also that they will smite with their swords, and that their blades can bite through the scales of Nak's warriors."

"What about the *Keth?*" Larry spoke.

"The *Keth* has the power to destroy the very rocks," Lakla said grimly.

BUT no more of this. No need to tell of all that passed, before the five of us and Nak walked from the castle in pursuance of plans that had ripened there. We crossed the bridge. We paced the crushed ruby floor until I gazed out, Tantaluslike, upon the elfin land of moss and flower. Ten miles it was between the cavern lip and the first green growth. Larry was for setting regiments of the *Akka* close behind the Portal to attack when Yolara's hosts came through. But Rador pointed out that the Murians would race over the roadway in their *coria,* and that as there was no place there for hiding, we would only leave a considerable number of our forces behind, useless.

The *coria* path ended with the astounding forests and those who would pass on to the Crimson Sea must proceed on foot or in litters to the crescent ledge. And so we decided to raise barricades along this path and behind them to garrison a certain number of the *Akka,* who, when the hosts of Lugur and Yolara should pass, would arise and smite them with lance and club while still others flanked them.

Across the cavern mouth we planned another barricade. At certain intervals over the span we placed marks and Lakla directed the frog-men to bring stones and set them there as barriers.

Bitterly, as we were pursuing these occupations, I wished for the little pocket camera I had carried with me through the moon door and had left, alas, with my medicine-case and other effects when we fled from our pavilion in the gardens.

"Larry darlin'," said the handmaiden, "the Silent Ones bid me say the time is come for them to ask us the question. They say, too, Goodwin, that they would have you there—because should you return to your own world there are things within your spirit to which they would set flame," she added.

She drew Larry's arm about her, clasped it, began to move slowly with him out of the chamber.

"The Three love me," she murmured. "I know they do—and you, too, Larry. And yet it is as though I felt a door closing behind us. The door that leads to freedom, Larry; nay, even a door that bars the road of life!"

At his exclamation she gathered herself together; gave a shaky little laugh.

"It's because I love you so that fear has the power to plague me," she told him.

Without another word he bent and kissed her; in silence we passed on, his arm still about her girdled waist, golden head and black close together. Soon we stood before the crimson slab that was the door of the sanctuary of the Silent Ones. She poised uncertainly before it.

Dazzled as before, I followed through the lambent cascades pouring from the high, carved walls; paused, and my eyes clearing, looked up—straight into the faces of the Three. They gazed down upon us over the rushing, veined and shadowed mists of curdled moon radiance streaming upward from the rim of their dais; from the marble-white faces, the jet triangles of eyes filled with the tiny, leaping red flames burned.

"Come closer," she commanded, "close to the feet of the Silent Ones."

We moved, pausing at the very base of the dais. The sparkling mists thinned; the great head bent slightly over us. Through the veils I caught a glimpse of huge columnar necks, enormous shoulders covered with draperies as of pale-blue fire. It came to me that these beings might be eighteen or twenty feet tall, giants indeed. And what were the hidden shapes beneath the half-revealed necks and shoulders?

I came back to attention with a start, for Lakla was answering a question only heard by her; and, answering it aloud, I perceived for our benefit. For whatever was the mode of communication between those whose handmaiden she was, and her, it was clearly independent of speech.

"He has been told," she said, "even as you commanded."

DID I see a shadow of pain flit across the flickering eyes? Wondering, I glanced at Lakla's face and there was a dawn of foreboding and bewilderment. For a little she held her listening attitude; then the gaze of the Three left her; focused upon the O'Keefe.

"Thus speak the Silent Ones, through Lakla, their handmaiden." The golden voice was like low trumpet notes. "At the threshold of doom is that world of yours

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above. Yea, even the doom, Goodwin, that ye dreamed and the shadow of which, looking into your mind they see, say the Three.

"Doom, they say, utter doom and the end of all things; cruelty and wickedness unspeakable; slavery most evil and at the last a dead-alive globe menacing the firmament. For not upon earth and never upon earth can man find means to destroy the Shining One. And free there, enthroned, the Shining One will know the strength it has and that now it does not know it has. Nor, say they, does it need that court which Lugur and Yolara plan to follow it. It does not even need Yolara. Power it has to make its own court on earth as soon as free—and none of these things does the Shining One yet know. But all of them it will know once it spreads its wings beneath sun as well as moon!"

She listened again, and the foreboding deepened to an amazed fear.

"They say, the Silent Ones," she went on, "that they know not whether they have power to destroy that which they made—even now. Energies we know nothing of entered into its shaping and are part of it; and still other energies it has gathered to itself." She paused; a shadow of puzzlement crept into her voice. "And other energies still, forces that ye *do* know and symbolize by certain names—hatred and pride and many others which are forces real as that hidden in the *Keth;* and among them—fear, which weakens all those others—" Again she paused.

"But within it is nothing of that greatest of all, that which can make powerless all the evil others, that which we call love," she ended softly.

"I'd like to be the one to put a little more *fear* in the beast," whispered Larry to me, grimly in our own English. The three weird heads bent, ever so slightly; a gleam as of approval flitted through the eyes. I gasped, and Larry grew a little white as Lakla nodded.

"They say, Larry," she said, "that there you touch one side of the heart of the matter. For it is through the way of fear the Silent Ones hope to strike at the very life of the Shining One!"

The visage Larry turned to me was eloquent of wonder; and mine reflected it, for what *really* were this Three to whom our minds were but open pages, so easily read? Not long could be conjecture; Lakla broke the little silence.

"This, they say, is what is to happen. First will come upon us Lugur and Yolara with all their host. Because of fear the Shining One will lurk behind within its lair; for despite all, the Dweller does dread the Three, and only them. With this host the Voice and the priestess will strive to conquer. And if they do, then will they be strong enough, too, to destroy us all. Also, if they take the abode they banish from the Dweller all fear and sound the end of the Three.

"Then will the Shining One be all free indeed; free to go out into the world, free to do there as it wills!

"But if they do not conquer—and the Shining One comes not to their aid, abandoning them even as it abandoned its own *Taithu*—then will the Three be loosed from a part of their doom, and they will go through the Portal, seeking the Shining One beyond the veil, and piercing it through fear's opening, destroy it."

"That's quite clear," murmured the O'Keefe in my ear. "Weaken the morale—then smash."

Lakla had been listening again. She turned, thrust out hands to Larry, a wild hope in her eyes, and yet a hope half shamed.

"They say," she cried, "that they give us choice. Remembering that your world doom hangs in the balance, we have choice—choice to stay and help fight Yolara's armies—and they say they look not lightly on that help. Or choice to go. And if so be you choose the latter, then will they show another way that leads into the passage through which you came, and that opens also into the Chamber of the Moon Pool.

"There, carrying food and drink, shall we stay until the Moon opens the door; and after that bring what means we may to destroy the Pool and seal up that gateway of the Shining One. Yet they bid me say, too, that if they are beaten, the Shining One will surely find other ways to go forth, though perhaps not in our time."

A flush had crept over O'Keefe's face as she was speaking. He took her hands and looked long into the golden eyes; glancing up I saw the Trinity were watching them intently, imperturbably.

"What do you say, *mavourneen?*" asked Larry gently. The handmaiden hung her head; trembled.

"Your words shall be mine, O one I love," she whispered. "So going or staying, I am beside you."

"And you, Goodwin?" He turned to me. I shrugged my shoulders. After all, I had no one to care.

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"It's up to you, Larry," I remarked.

The O'Keefe straightened, squared his shoulders, gazed straight into the flame-flickering eyes.

"We stick!" he said briefly.

The marble visages of the Three softened, and the little flames died down. Then Lakla started, plainly surprised.

"Wait," she said, "there is one other thing they say we must answer before they will hold us to that promise. Wait!"

She listened, and then her face grew white—white as those of the Three themselves. The glorious eyes widened, stark terror filling them.

The whole lithe body of her shook like a reed in the wind.

"Not that!" she cried out to the Three. "Oh, not that! Not Larry! Let me go even as you will, but not him!" She threw up frantic hands to the woman-being of the Trinity. "Let *me* bear it alone," she wailed. "Alone—mother! Mother!"

The Three bent their heads toward her, their faces pitiful, and from the eyes of the woman One rolled tears. Larry leaped to Lakla's side.

"Mavourneen!" he cried. "Sweetheart, what have they said to you?"

He glared up at the Silent Ones, his hand twitching toward the high-hung pistol holster.

THE handmaiden swung to him; threw white arms around his neck; held her head upon his heart until her sobbing ceased.

"This they—say—the—Silent Ones," she gasped; and then all the courage of her came back. "O heart of mine!" she whispered to Larry, gazing deep into his eyes, his anxious face cupped between her white palms. "This they say—that should the Shining One come to succor Yolara and Lugur, should it conquer its fear and do this, then is there but one way left to destroy it and to save your world."

She swayed; he gripped her tightly.

"But one way. You and I must walk together into its embrace! Yes, we must pass within it—loving each other, loving the world, realizing to the full all that we sacrifice and sacrificing all, our love, our lives, perhaps even that you call soul, O loved one; must give ourselves *all* to the Shining One—gladly, freely, our love for each other flaming high within us—that this curse that threatens your earth shall pass away! For if we do this, pledge the Three, then shall that power of love we carry into it weaken and baffle for a time all that evil which the Shining One has become, and in that time the Three can strike and slay!"

The blood rushed from my heart; scientist that I am, essentially, my reason rejected any such solution as this of the activities of the Dweller. Then into the whirling vortex of my mind came steadying reflections—of history changed by the power of hate, of passion, of ambition, and most of all, by love. Was there not actual dynamic energy in these things? Was there not a Son of Man who hung upon a cross on Calvary?

"Dear love o' mine," said the O'Keefe quietly, "is it in your heart to say yes to this?"

"Larry," she spoke low, "what is in your heart is in mine; but I did so want to go with you, to live with you. To—to bear you children, Larry—and to see the sun."

My eyes were wet with tears; dimly through them I saw his gaze on me.

"If the world *is* at stake," he whispered, "why of course there's only one thing to do."

He turned to the Three—and did I in their poise sense a rigidity, an anxiety that sat upon them as alienly as would divinity upon men?

"Tell me this, Silent Ones," he cried. "If we do this, Lakla and I, is it sure you are that you can slay the Thing, and save my world?"

For the first and the last time, I heard the voice of the Silent Ones. It was the man-being at the right who spoke.

"We are sure," he said, and the tones rolled out like deepest organ notes, shaking, vibrating, assailing the ears more strangely than their appearance struck the eyes. Another moment the O'Keefe stared at them. Then I saw conviction spread over his face. Once more he squared his shoulders; lifted Lakla's chin and smiled into her eyes.

"We stick!" he said again.

Over the visages of the Trinity fell benignity that was awesome. The tiny flames in the jet orbs vanished, leaving them wells in which brimmed serenity, hope—an extraordinary joyfulness. The woman sat upright, tender gaze fixed upon the man and girl. I saw her great shoulders raise as though she had lifted her arms and had drawn to her those others. The three faces pressed together for a fleeting moment; raised again. The woman bent forward, and as she did so, Lakla and Larry, as though drawn by some outer force, were swept against the dais.

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Out from the sparkling mist stretched two hands, enormously long, six-fingered, thumbless, a faint tracery of golden scales upon their white backs. Utterly unhuman and still in some strange way beautiful, radiating power and—all womanly!

They stretched forth; they touched the bent heads of Lakla and the O'Keefe; caressed them, drew them together, softly stroked them lovingly, with more than a touch of benediction. And withdrew!

The sparkling mists rolled up once more, hiding the Silent Ones. As silently as once before we had gone, we passed out of the place of light, beyond the crimson stone, back to the handmaiden's chamber.

Only once on our way did Larry O'Keefe speak.

"Cheer up, darlin'," he said to her, "it's a long way yet before the finish. An' are you thinking that Lugur and Yolara are going to pull this thing off? Are you?"

The handmaiden only looked at him, eyes love and sorrow filled.

"They are!" said Larry. "They are! Like hell they are!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE MEETING OF TITANS

IT IS not my intention, nor is it possible no matter how interesting to me, to set down *ad seriatum* the happenings of the next twelve hours. But a few will not be denied recital.

Lakla, shining-eyed, filled with extremely grateful news—

"The Three say again to have no fear of the *Keth*, nor for aught else of the weapons of light of Yolara," she said. "The *Akka* must face them, it is true—and would I could help my people," she sighed.

"But against us here, or the bridge or the abode, those things will be helpless. I have other tidings that I am afraid will please you little, Larry darlin'." She was half fearful. "The Silent Ones say that you must not go into battle yourself. You must stay here with me, and with Goodwin—for if—if—the Shining One does come, then must we both be here to meet it. And you might not be, you, know, Larry, if you fight," she said, looking shyly up at him from under the long lashes.

The O'Keefe's jaw dropped. "That's about the hardest yet," he answered slowly.

Olaf's fierce joy in the coming fray—

"The Norns spin close to the end of this web," he rumbled. "*Ja!* And the threads of Lugur and the Heks woman are between their fingers for the breaking! Thor will be with me, and I have fashioned me a hammer in glory of Thor." In his hand was an enormous mace of black metal, fully five feet long, crowned with a massive head. "I fashioned it at a forge of the frog-men from something I found here."

"But I go not from here," he said. "No, the gods tell me I shall not. I know that mine Helma is to be freed from death-in-life, and we go out together as we sailed together—to meet the *yndling! Ja!*"

I pass to the twelve hours' closing.

At the end of the *coria* road where the giant fern-land met the edge of the cavern's ruby floor, hundreds of the *Akka* were stationed in ambush, armed with their spears tipped with the rotting death and their nail-studded, metal-headed clubs. These were to attack when the Murians debouched from the *corials*. We had little hope of doing more here than effect some attrition of Yolara's hosts, for at this place the captains of the Shining One could wield the *Keth* and their other uncanny weapons freely. We had learned, too, that every forge and artisan had been put to work to make an armor Von Hetzdorp had devised to withstand the natural battle equipment of the frog-people—and both Larry and I had a disquieting faith in the German's ingenuity.

At any rate the numbers against us would be lessened.

Next, under the direction of the frog-king, levies commanded by subsidiary chieftains had completed the rows of rough walls along the probable route of the Murians through the cavern. These afforded the *Akka* a fair protection behind which they could hurl their darts and spears.

At the opening of the cavern the strong barricade we had planned stretched almost to the two ends of the crescent strand. Almost, I say, because there had not been time to build it entirely across the mouth.

And from edge to edge of the titanic bridge, from where it sprang outward at the shore of the Crimson Sea to a hundred feet away from the golden door of the abode, barrier after barrier was piled.

Behind the wall defending the mouth of the cavern waited other thousands of the *Akka*. At each end of the unfinished barricade they were mustered thickly, and at right and left of the crescent where their forests began, more legions were assembled to make way up to the ledge.

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Rank upon rank they manned the bridge barriers. They swarmed over the pinnacles and in the hollows of the island's ragged outer lips. The domed castle was a hive of them, if I may mix metaphors—and the rocks and gardens that surrounded the abode glittered with them.

Upon their stick-at-itiveness, fearlessness, and the sheer weight of their numbers we had, perforce, to rest our hopes. It was primitive strategy, no doubt, but what else could we do? And at last, when all was finished, the handmaiden came to us, rather guiltily, bearing with her frog-woman armsful of metallic robes like that she had worn when she faced Yolara in the banquet hall.

"They are shields against the *Keth*," she explained.

"But, darlin', the Three have said that we need not fear the *Keth* here," objected Larry.

"I know," she said; "but I'd feel much better if you wore one, Larry," she ended defiantly.

"Far be it from me to give you any more worry than you've got," answered the O'Keefe, and he donned one. Rador and I—then Olaf, after a little hesitation—followed his example.

Upon Nak, the Frog King, she threw another, showing him how to cover his great eyes, and then, because the folds came hardly to his knees, she cut the hem from another, stitching it rapidly on with a long needle of curious iridescent metal. Of the robes left there were enough to cover three of his captains. And queer enough the four looked as they strode away, out upon the bridge to take their places at the head of their forces.

"Now," said the handmaiden, "there's nothing else we can do, save wait."

She led us out through her bower and up the little path that ran to the embrasure I have described in a previous chapter.

We watched, all of us—even Lakla, to whom the sight was at least partly familiar—a little awed.

Raising my glass, I saw the lines of the *Akka* furthest away leap into sudden activity. Spurred warrior after warrior leaped upon the barricade and over it. Flashes of intense green light, mingled with gleams like lightning strokes of concentrated moon rays, sprang from behind the wall—sprang and struck and burned upon the scales of the batracians.

"They come!" whispered Lakla. "They have won through! And they use the *Keth* upon my *Akka!*" Her hands clenched; her eyes blazed.

At the far ends of the crescent a terrific milling had begun. Here it was plain the *Akka* were holding. Faintly, for the distance was great, I could see fresh force upon force rush up and take the places of those who had fallen.

Over each of these ends, and along the whole line of the barricade a mist of dancing, diamonded atoms began to rise; sparkling, coruscating points of diamond dust that darted and danced.

What had once been Lakla's guardians dancing now in the nothingness!

"God, but it's hard to stay here like this!" groaned the O'Keefe; Olaf's teeth were bared, the lips drawn back in such a fighting grin as his ancestors berserk on their raven ships must have borne; Rador was livid with rage; the handmaiden's nostrils flaring wide, all her wrathful soul in her eyes.

SUDDENLY, while we looked, the rocky wall which the *Akka* had built at the cavern mouth—was not! It vanished, as though an unseen, unbelievably gigantic hand had with the lightning's speed swept it away. And with it vanished, too, long lines of the great amphibians close behind it. It was sorcery!

Down upon the ledge, dropping into the Crimson Sea, sending up geysers of ruby spray, dashing on the bridge, crushing the frog-men, fell a shower of stone, mingled with distorted shapes and fragments whose scales still flashed meteoric as they hurled from above.

"That which makes things fall upward," hissed Olaf. "That which I saw in the garden of Lugur!"

The fiendish agency of destruction which Von Hetzdorp had revealed to Larry; the force that cut off gravitation and sent all things within its range racing outward into space! My heart chilled—and now over the debris upon the ledge, striking with long sword and daggers, here and there a captain flashing the green ray, moving on in ordered squares, came the soldiers of the Shining One. Nearer and nearer the verge of the ledge they pushed Nak's warriors. Leaping upon the dwarfs, smiting them with spear and club, with teeth and spur, the *Akka* fought like devils. Quivering under the ray they leaped and dragged down and slew. Now there was but one long line at the very edge of the cliff.

And ever the clouds of dancing, dia-

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monded atoms grew thicker over them all!

That last thin line of the *Akka* was going; yet they fought to the last, and none toppled over the lip without at least one of the armored Murians in his arms.

There, my gaze dropping to the foot of the cliffs, I grew tense with fascination of horror. Stretched along their length was a wide ribbon of beauty—a shimmering multitude of gleaming, pulsing, prismatic moons; glowing, glowing ever brighter, ever more wondrous—the gigantic *Medusae* globes feasting on dwarf and frog-men alike!

Larry was rigid, his eyes dazed; Lakla, arm around his neck, stood as though turned to stone. Across the waters, faintly, came a triumphant shouting from Lugur's and Yolara's men!

Was the ruddy light of the place lessening, growing paler, changing to a faint rose? I rubbed my eyes, thinking that the strain of watching had dimmed them. No, it was not that. There was an exclamation from Larry; something like hope relaxed the drawn muscles of his face. He pointed to the aureate dome wherein sat the Three—and then I saw!

Out of it, through the long transverse slit through which the Silent Ones kept their watch on cavern, bridge, and abyss, a torrent of the opalescent light was pouring. It cascaded like a waterfall, and as it flowed it spread, whirling out in columns and eddies, clouds and wisps of misty, curdled coruscations. It hung like a veil over all the island, filtering everywhere, driving back the crimson light as though possessed of impenetrable substance—and still it cast not the faintest shadowing upon our vision.

"Good God!" breathed Larry. "Look!"

The radiance was *marching* down the colossal bridge. It moved swiftly, in some unthinkable way *intelligently*. It swathed the *Akka*, and closer, ever closer it swept toward the approach upon which Yolara's men had now gained foothold.

From their ranks came flash after flash of the green ray, aimed at the abode! But as the light sped and struck the opalescence it was blotted out! The shimmering mists seemed to enfold, to dissipate it—as, it came to me, the rays of an automobile headlight are checked by fog.

Lakla drew a deep breath.

"The Silent Ones forgive me for doubting them," she whispered; and again hope blossomed on her face even as it did on Larry's.

The frog-men were gaining. Clothed in the armor of that mist they pressed back from the bridge-head the invaders. There was another prodigious movement at the ends of the crescent, and racing up, pressing against the dwarfs, came other legions of Nak's warriors. And reenforcing those out on the prodigious arch, the frog-men stationed in the gardens below us poured back to the castle and out through the open Portal.

"They're licked!" shouted Larry. "They're—"

So quickly I could not follow the movement, his automatic leaped to his hand—spoke, once and again and again. Rador leaped to the head of the little path, sword in hand. Olaf, shouting and whirling his mace, followed. I strove to get my own gun quickly.

For up that path were running two score of Lugur's men, while from below Lugur's own voice roared.

"Quick! Slay not the handmaiden or her lover! Carry them down. Quick! But slay the others!"

The handmaiden raced toward Larry, stopped, whistled shrilly—again and again. Larry's pistol was empty, but as the dwarfs rushed upon him I dropped two of them with mine. It jammed—I could not use it; I sprang to his side. Rador was down, struggling in a heap of Lugur's men. Olaf, a Viking of old, was whirling his great hammer and striking, striking through armor, flesh, and bone.

Larry was down; Lakla flew to him. But the Norseman, now streaming blood from a dozen wounds, caught a glimpse of her coming, turned, thrust out a mighty hand, sent her reeling back. And then with his hammer *cracked* the skulls of those trying to drag the O'Keefe down the path.

A cry from Lakla—the dwarfs had seized her, had lifted her despite her struggle, were carrying her away. One I dropped with the butt of my useless pistol, and then went down myself under the rush of another.

Through the clamor I heard a booming of the *Akka*, closer, closer; then through it the bellow of Lugur. I made a mighty effort, swung a hand up, and sunk my fingers in the throat of the soldier striving to kill me. Writhing over him, my fingers touched a poniard; I thrust it deep, staggered to my feet.

The O'Keefe, shielding Lakla, was battling with a long sword against a half dozen of the soldiers. I started toward him, was struck, and under the impact hurled

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to the ground. Dizzily I raised myself—and leaning upon my elbow, stared and moved no more. For the dwarfs lay dead, and Larry, holding Lakla tightly, was staring even as I. And ranged at the head of the path were the *Akka,* whose booming advance in obedience to the hand-maiden's call I had heard.

And at what we all stared was Olaf, crimson with his wounds, and Lugur, in blood-red armor, locked in each other's grip, struggling, smiting, tearing, kicking, and swaying about the little space before the embrasure. I crawled over toward the O'Keefe. He raised his pistol, dropped it.

"Can't hit him without hitting Olaf," he whispered. Lakla signaled the frog-men; they advanced toward the two. But Olaf saw them, broke the red dwarf's hold, sent Lugur reeling a dozen feet away.

"No!" shouted the Norseman, the ice of his pale-blue eyes glinting like frozen flames, blood streaming down his face and dripping from his hands. "No! Lugur is mine! None but me slays him! Ho, you Lugur—" And cursed him and Yolara and the Dweller madly, hideously.

They spurred Lugur. Mad now as the Norseman, the red dwarf sprang. Olaf struck a blow that would have killed an ordinary man, but Lugur only grunted, swept in and seized him about the waist; one mighty arm began to creep up toward Huldricksson's throat.

"'Ware, Olaf!" cried O'Keefe; but Olaf did not answer. He waited until the red dwarf's hand was close to his shoulder. And then, with an incredibly rapid movement—once before had I seen something like it in a wrestling match between Papuans—he had twisted Lugur around; twisted him so that Olaf's right arm lay across the tremendous breast; the left behind the neck. And Olaf's left leg held the Voice's armored thighs viselike against his right knee while over that knee lay the small of the red dwarf's back.

For a second or two the Norseman looked upon his enemy motionless in that paralyzing grip. And then, slowly, he began to break him!

Lakla gave a little cry; made a motion toward the two. But Larry drew her down against his breast, hiding her eyes; then fastened his own upon the pair, white-faced, stern.

Slowly, ever so slowly, proceeded Olaf. Twice Lugur moaned. At the end he screamed—horribly. There was a cracking sound, as of a stout stick snapped.

Huldricksson stooped, silently. He picked up the limp body of the Voice, not yet dead, for the eyes rolled, the lips strove to speak. Lifted it, walked to the parapet, swung it twice over his head. And cast it down to the red waters!

THE Norseman turned toward us. There was now no madness in his eyes; only a great weariness. And there was peace on the once tortured face.

"Helma," he whispered, "I go a little before! Soon you will come to me—to me and the *yndling*—who will await you —Helma, mine *liebe!*"

Blood gushed from his mouth; he swayed, fell. And thus died Olaf Huldricksson, one of those upon whom the Dweller's blight had fallen, helping to save his fellow men from the Dweller's soul-destroying curse. Simple-hearted as a child, faithful, fearless, worthy of any of his conquering forefathers, and passing away even as they would have elected to go—and in their ancient faith. Wounds enough to have killed four lesser men he had got in that battle wherein, without him, Lugur's men could not have been held. And even now my marveling how even his strength could have been great enough to do what he did with the red dwarf, is not dulled.

We looked down upon him; nor did Lakla, nor Larry, nor I try to hide our tears. And as we stood the *Akka* brought to us that other mighty fighter, Rador; but in him there was life, and we attended to him there as best we could.

Then Lakla spoke.

"We will bear him into the castle where we may give him greater care," she said. "For, lo! the hosts of Yolara have been beaten back; and on the bridge comes Nak with tidings."

We looked over the parapet. It was even as she had said. Neither on ledge nor bridge was there trace of living men of Muria. Only heaps of slain that lay everywhere. And thick against the cavern mouth danced the flashing atoms of those the green ray had destroyed. About the dead, casting them down to the Crimson Sea and its elf-moon feasters, thronged the *Akka.*

"Over!" exclaimed Larry incredulously. "We live then, heart of mine!"

"The Silent Ones recall their veils," she said, pointing to the dome. Back through the slitted opening the radiance was streaming; withdrawing from sea and island; marching back over the bridge with

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that same ordered, intelligent motion. Behind it the red light pressed, like skirmishers right on the heels of a retreating army.

"And yet—" faltered Lakla, and was silent. We fell in behind the unconscious Rador, the dead Olaf, both in the arms of the batracians; and there was nothing whatever of jubilance in any of our three hearts.

"And yet—" repeated the handmaiden as we passed into her chamber, and doubtful were the eyes she turned upon the O'Keefe.

What was that sound beating into the chamber, faintly, so faintly? My heart gave a great throb and seemed to stop for an eternity. What was it—coming nearer, ever nearer? Now Lakla and O'Keefe heard it, stiffened, life ebbing from lips and cheeks.

Nearer, nearer—a music as of myriads of tiny crystal bells, tinkling, tinkling. A storm of pizzicato upon violins of glass! Nearer, nearer—not sweetly now, nor luring; no—raging, wrathful, sinister beyond words; sweeping on; nearer—

The Dweller! The Shining One!

We leaped to the narrow window; peered out, aghast. The bell notes swept through and about us, a hurricane. The crescent strand was once more a ferment. Back, back were the *Akka* being swept, as though by brooms, tottering on the edge of the ledge, falling into the waters. Swiftly they were finished; and where they had fought was an eddying throng of women and men, clothed in tatters, swaying, drifting, arms tossing—like marionettes of Satan.

The dead-alive! The slaves of the Dweller!

They swayed and tossed, and then, like water racing through an opened dam, they swept upon the bridge-head. On and on they pushed, like the bore of a mighty tide. The frog-men strove against them, clubbing, spearing, tearing them. But even those worst smitten seemed not to fall. On they pushed, driving forward, irresistible—a battering ram of flesh and bone.

They clove the masses of the *Akka*, pressing them to the sides of the bridge and over. Nor did the fact that every huge amphibian that fell carried in his horny arms one of them, seem to lessen their numbers. Back and back they forced those of Nak's warriors who still found footing on the span. Through the open Portal they forced them, for there was no room for the frog-men to stand against that implacable tide.

Then those of the *Akka* who were left turned their backs and ran. We heard the clang of the golden wings of the gateway, and none too soon to keep out the first of the Dweller's dreadful hordes.

Now upon the cavern ledge and over the whole length of the bridge there were none but the dead-alive, men and women, black-polled *ladala*, sloe-eyed Malays, slant-eyed Chinese, men of every race that sailed the seas—milling, turning, swaying, like leaves caught in a sluggish current.

The bell notes became sharper, more insistent. At the cavern mouth a radiance began to grow—a gleaming from which the atoms of diamond dust seemed to try to fly. And now occurred what to me was the ghastliest incident—save one, which I have yet to relate—of all this incredible scene. As the radiance grew and the crystal notes rang nearer, every head of that hideous multitude turned stiffly, slowly toward the right, looking toward the far bridge end; their eyes fixed and glaring; every face an inhuman mask of rapture and of horror!

A movement shook them, as though at some command. Those in the center began to stream back, faster and ever faster, leaving motionless deep ranks on each side. Back they flowed until from golden doors to cavern mouth a wide lane stretched, walled on each side by the dead-alive.

The far radiance grew brighter still; it gathered itself at the end of the gruesome lane; it was shot with sparklings and with pulsings of polychromatic light. The crystal storm grew intolerable, piercing the ears with countless tiny lances; brighter still the radiance—

From the cavern swirled the Shining one!

THE Dweller paused, seemed to scan the island of the Silent Ones half doubtfully; then slowly, stately, it drifted out upon the bridge. My hand was gripped in a bitter slasp; I saw Larry was holding it. Closer drew the Shining One; behind it glided Yolara at the head of a company of her dwarfs, and at her side was the hag of the council whose face was the withered shattered echo of her own.

Slower grew the Dweller's pace as it drew nearer. Did I sense in it a doubt, an uncertainty? The crystal-tongued, unseen choristers that accompanied it subtly seemed to reflect the doubt; their notes were not sure, no longer insistent; rather

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was there in them an undertone of hesitancy, of warning! Yet on came the Shining One until it stood plain beneath us, searching with those eyes that thrust from and withdrew into unknown spheres, the golden gateway, the cliff face, the castle's rounded bulk—and more intently than any of these, the dome wherein sat the Three.

Behind it each face of the dead-alive turned toward it, and those beside it throbbed and gleamed with its luminescence.

Yolara crept close, just beyond the reach of its spirals. Rosy shone her flesh through her gossamer veils, blue as pale sapphires were her eyes, and in the radiance of the Shining One the coronal of corn-silk tresses sparkled. Once more, even in our deadly peril, I realized how beautiful was the priestess. She raised her face, looking straight toward where we watched, as though her glance had been summoned by our gaze. She murmured—and the head of the Dweller bent toward her, its seven globes steady in their shining mists, as though listening. It listened, drew itself erect once more, resumed its doubtful scrutiny. Yolara's face darkened; she turned abruptly, spoke to a captain of her guards. A dwarf raced back between the palisades of dead-alive.

Now the priestess cried out, her voice ringing like a silver clarion.

"Ye are done, ye Three! The Shining One stands at your door, demanding entrance. Your beasts are slain and your power is gone. Who are ye, says the Shining One, to deny it entrance to the place of its birth?" There was biting mockery in this last. "Now will ye open your doors and let us pass, or must we open them for ye?" She paused. No answer came from those upon whom she was calling.

"Ye do not answer," she cried again, "yet know we that ye hear! The Shining One offers these terms: Send forth your handmaiden and that lying stranger she stole; send them forth to us—and perhaps ye may live. But if ye send them not forth, then shall ye, too, die—and soon!"

An odd paralysis had gripped us, but it was not fear. None of fear did I feel—at least none for myself—and searching the eyes of Lakla and Larry, I saw no trace of it in either. Rather was it an inhibition. Something that stilled all desire to speak, as though a hand had been laid over my mouth. We waited, silent, even as did Yolara. And still there was no answer from the Three.

The priestess laughed.

"It is ended!" she cried. "If you will not open, needs must we open for you!"

Over the bridge was marching a long double file of the dwarfs. They bore a smoothed and handled tree-trunk whose head was knobbed with a huge ball of metal. Past the priestess, past the Shining One, they carried it; fifty of them to each side of the ram; and behind them stepped —Von Hetzdorp!

Larry awoke to life.

"Now, thank God," he rasped, "I can get the Heinie, anyway!"

He drew his pistol, took careful aim. Even as he pressed the trigger there rang through the abode a tremendous clanging. The ram was battering at the gates. O'Keefe's bullet went wild. The German must have heard the shot; perhaps the missile was closer than we knew. He made a swift leap behind the guards, was lost to sight.

Once more the thunderous clanging rang through the castle.

Lakla drew herself erect; down upon her dropped the listening aloofness.

"It is time, O love of mine." She turned to O'Keefe. "The Silent Ones say that the way of fear is closed, but the way of love is open. They call upon us to redeem our promise!"

For a hundred heart-beats they clung to each other, breast to breast and lip to lip. Below, the clangor was increasing, the great trunk swinging harder and faster upon the metal gates. Now Lakla gently loosed the arms of the O'Keefe, and for another instant those two looked deep into each other's souls. The handmaiden smiled tremulously.

"I would it might have been otherwise, Larry darlin'," she whispered. "But at least —we pass together, dearest of mine!"

She leaped to the window.

"Yolara!" the golden voice rang out sweetly. The clanging ceased. "Draw back your men. We open the Portal and come forth to you and the Shining One—Larry and I."

The priestess's silver chimes of laughter rang out, cruel, mocking.

"Come, then, and quickly," she jeered. "For surely both the Shining One and I have long yearned for you!" Her malice-laden laughter chimed high once more. "Keep us not lonely long!" the priestess mocked.

LARRY drew a deep breath, stretched both hands out to me.

"It's good-by, I guess, Doc." His voice

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was strained. "Good-by and good luck, old boy. If you get out, and you will, let the old *Dolphin* know I'm gone. And carry on, pal—and always remember the O'Keefe loved you like a brother."

I squeezed his hands desperately. Then out of my balance-shaking woe a strange comfort was born.

"Maybe it's not good-by, Larry!" I cried. "The banshee has not cried!"

A flash of hope passed over his face; the old reckless grin shone forth.

"It's so!" he said. "By the Lord, it's so!"

Then Lakla bent toward me, and for the second time—kissed me.

"Come!" she said to Larry. Hand in hand they moved away, into the corridor that led to the door outside of which waited the Shining One and its beautiful priestess.

And unseen by them, wrapped as they were within their love and sacrifice, I crept softly behind. For I had determined that if enter the Dweller's embrace they must, they should not go alone. There was no one to mourn for me—and it had come clearly to my mind that without them I did not care to live. Nothing of this had I spoken—for well I knew that they would have forbidden it.

They paused before the Golden Portals; the handmaiden pressed its opening lever; the massives leaves rolled back.

Heads high, proudly, serenely, they passed through and out upon the hither span. I followed.

On each side of us stood the Dweller's slaves, faces turned rigidly toward their master. A hundred feet away the Shining One pulsed and spiraled in its evilly glorious lambency of sparkling plumes.

Unhestitating, always with that same high serenity, Lakla and the O'Keefe, hands clasped like little children, drew closer to that wondrous shape of nebulous flame. I could not see their faces, but I saw awe fall upon those of the watching dwarfs, and into the burning eyes of Yolara crept a doubt.

Closer they drew to the Dweller, and closer, I following them step by step. The Shining One's whirling lessened: its tinklings were faint, almost stilled. It seemed to watch them apprehensively. A silence fell upon us all, thick silence, brooding, ominous, palpable. Now the pair were face to face with the child of the Three—so near that with one of its misty tentacles it could have enfolded them.

And the Shining One drew back!

Yes, drew back—and back with it stepped Yolara, the doubt in her eyes deepening.

Onward paced the handmaiden and the O'Keefe. Step by step, as they advanced, the Dweller withdrew; its bell notes chiming out, puzzled, questioning—half fearful!

And back it drew, and back until it had reached the very center of that platform over the abyss in whose depths pulsed the green fires of earth heart. And there Yolara gripped herself; the hell that laughed within her soul leaped out of her eyes; a cry, a shriek of rage, tore then from her lips.

As at a signal, the Shining One flamed high; its spirals and eddying mists swirled madly, the pulsing core of it blazed radiance.

A score of coruscating tentacles swept straight upon the pair who stood intrepid, unresisting, awaiting its embrace. And upon me, lurking behind them.

Through me swept a mighty exaltation. It was the end, then—and I was to meet it with them.

Something drew us back, back with an incredible swiftness, and yet as gently as a summer breeze a bit of thistledown! Drew us back from those darting misty arms even as they were a hairbreadth from us! I heard the Dweller's bell notes burst out ragingly; I heard Yolara scream.

What was that?

Between the three of us and them was a ring of curdled moon flames, swirling about the Shining One and its priestess, pressing in upon them, enfolding them!

And within it I glimpsed the faces of the Three—implacable, sorrowful, filled with a supernal power!

SPARKS and flashes of white flame darted from the ring, penetrated the radiant swathings of the Dweller, striking through its pulsing nucleus, piercing its seven crowning orbs.

Now the Shining One's radiance began to lessen, the seven orbs to dull. The tiny sparkling filaments that ran from them down into the Dweller's body snapped, vanished! Through the battling nebulosities Yolara's face swam forth—horror-filled, distorted, inhuman!

The ranks of the dead-alive quivered, moved, writhed, as though each felt the torment of the Thing that had enslaved them. The radiance that the Three wielded grew more intense, thicker, seemed to expand. Within it, suddenly, were scores of flaming triangles—scores of eyes like those of the Silent Ones!

And the Shining One's seven little moons of amber, of silver, of blue and amethyst

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and green, of rose and white, split, shattered, were gone! Abruptly the tortured crystal chimings ceased.

And dulled, all its soul-shaking beauty dead, blotched, and shadowed squalidly, its gleaming plumes tarnished, its dancing spirals stripped from it, that which had been the Shining One wrapped itself about Yolara. Wrapped and drew her into itself; writhed, swayed, and hurled itself over the edge of the bridge—down, down into the green fires of the unfathomable abyss—with its priestess still enfolded in its coils!

From the soldiers who, rigid as stone, had watched that terror, came crazed screams of panic fear. They turned and ran, racing frantically over the bridge toward the cavern mouth.

The serried ranks of the dead-alive trembled, shook. Then from their faces fled the horror of wedded ecstasy and anguish. Peace, utter peace, followed eventually in its wake.

And as fields of wheat are bent and fall beneath the wind, they fell. No longer dead-alive, now all of the blessed dead, freed from their dreadful slavery!

Abruptly from the sparkling mists the cloud of eyes were gone. Faintly revealed in them were only the heads of the Silent Ones. And they drew before us; were before us! No flames now in their ebon eyes—for the flickering fires were quenched in great tears, streaming down the marble white faces. They bent toward us, over us; their radiance enfolded us. My eyes darkened. I could not see. I felt a tender hand upon my head—and panic and frozen dread and nightmare web that held me fled.

I was happy!

Then they, too, were gone.

Far away was a great shouting. Over the body-strewn crescent strand came pouring regiments of the *Akka;* out of the cavern mouth up on the bridge marched companies of the *ladala.*

Upon Larry's breast the handmaiden was sobbing—sobbing out her heart. But this time it was with the joy of one who is swept up from the very threshold of hell into paradise.

CHAPTER XX

VON HETZDORP STRIKES!

"MY HEART, Larry—" It was the handmaiden's murmur. "My heart feels like a bird that is flying from a nest of sorrow."

We were pacing down the length of the bridge, guards of the *Akka* beside us, others following with those companies of the *ladala* that had rushed to aid us. In front of us the bandaged Rador swung gently within a litter; beside him, in another, lay Nak, the Frog King— much less of him than there had been before the battle began, but living.

Hours had passed since the terror I have just related. My first task had been to search for Throckmartin and his wife among the fallen multitudes strewn thick

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as autumn leaves along the flying arch of stone, over the cavern ledge, and back, back as far as the eye could reach. Had they been of those who, clutched in the arms of the amphibians, had dropped by the thousands into the red waters where now myriad upon myriad of the giant *Medusae* feasted and gleamed? Fervently I prayed that their bodies had been spared that at least.

At last, Lakla and Larry helping, we found them. They lay close to the bridge-end, not parted—locked tight in each other's arms, pallid face to face, her hair streaming over his breast! As though when that unearthly life the Dweller had set within them passed away, their own had come back for one fleeting instant—and they had known each other, and clasped before kindly death had taken them.

"Love is stronger than all things." The handmaiden was weeping softly. "Love never left them. Love was stronger than the Shining One. And when its evil fled, love went with them—wherever souls go."

Of Stanton and Thora there was no trace; nor, after our discovery of those other two, did I care to look more. They were dead—and they were free.

We buried Throckmartin and Edith beside Olaf in Lakla's bower. But before the body of my old friend was placed within the grave I gave it a careful and sorrowful examination. The skin was firm and smooth, but cold; not the cold of death, but with a strange chill that set my touching fingers tingling unpleasantly.

The body was bloodless; the course of veins and arteries marked by faintly indented white furrows, as though their walls had long collapsed. Lips, mouth, even the tongue, were paper-white. Yet there was no sign of dissolution, as we know it; no shadow or stain upon the marble surface. Whatever the force that, streaming from the Dweller or impregnating its lair, had energized the dead-alive, it was barrier against putrescence of any kind; that at least was certain.

But it was not barrier against the poison of the *Medusae,* for, our sad task done, and looking down upon the waters, I saw the pale forms of the Dweller's hordes dissolving, vanishing into the shifting glories of the gigantic moons sailing down upon them from every quarter of the Sea of Crimson.

While the frog-men, those late levies from the farthest forests, were clearing bridge and ledge of cavern of the litter of dead, we listened to the leader of the *ladala.* They had risen, as the messenger had promised Rador. Fierce had been the struggle in the gardened city by the silver waters with those Lugur and Yolara had left behind to garrison it. Deadly had been the slaughter of the fair-haired, reaping the harvest of hatred they had been sowing so long. Not without a pang of regret did I think of the beautiful, gaily malicious elfin women destroyed—even though they may have been wicked.

The ancient city of Lora, where the enigmatic *Taithu* had dwelt before the Murians came to it, was a charnel. Of all the rulers not twoscore had escaped, and these into regions of peril which to describe as sanctuary would be mockery. Nor had the *ladala* escaped so well. Of all the men and women, for women as well as men had taken their part in the swift war, not more than a tenth remained alive.

And the dancing motes of light in the silver air were thick.

They told us of the Shining One rushing through the Veil, comet like, its hosts streaming behind it, raging with it, in ranks that seemed interminable!

Of the massacre of the priests and priestesses in the Cyclopean temple; of the flashing of the summoning lights by some unseen hands—followed by the tearing of the rainbow curtain, by colossal shattering of the radiant cliffs; the vanishing behind their débris of all traces of entrance to the haunted place wherein the hordes of the Shining One had slaved—the sealing of the lair!

Then, when the tempest of hate had ended in immortal Lora, how, thrilled with victory, armed with the weapons of those they had slain, they had lifted the Shadow, passed through the Portal, met and slaughtered the fleeting remnants of Yolara's men—only to find the tempest stilled here.

But of Von Hetzdorp they had seen nothing. Had the German escaped, I wondered, or was he lying out there among the dead? But how could he have escaped? And even should he by some miracle be able to pass the Portal, what chance was there for him beyond? None, it seemed to me; and slender indeed the chance that he had survived the debacle. Still, it was strange that none of these had seen him with those fear-crazed troops racing straight into their arms.

BUT now the *ladala* were calling upon Lakla to come with them, to govern them.

(Continued on page 124)

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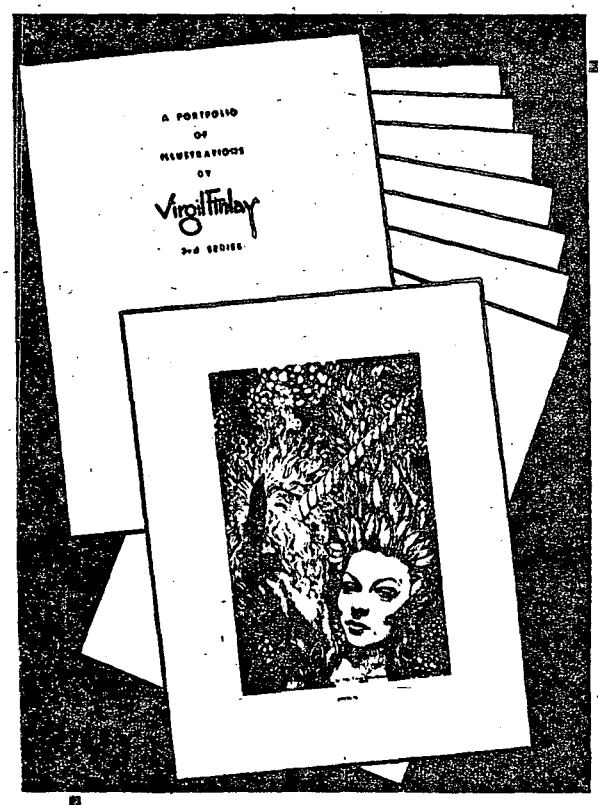

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(Continued from page 122)

"I don't want to, Larry darlin'," she told him. "I want to go out with you to Ireland. But for a time—I think the Three would have us remain and set that place in order."

The O'Keefe was bothered about something else than the government of Muria.

"If they've killed off all the priests, who's to marry us, heart of mine?" he worried. "None of those Siya and Siyana rites, no matter what," he added hastily.

"Marry!" cried the handmaiden incredulously. "Marry us? Why, Larry dear, we *are* married!"

The O'Keefe's astonishment was complete; his jaw dropped; collapse seemed imminent.

"We are?" he gasped. "When?" he stammered fatuously.

"Why, when the mother drew us together before her; when she put her hands on our heads after we had made the promise! Didn't you understand that?" asked the handmaiden wonderingly.

Quickly were our preparations for departure made. Rador, conscious, his immense vitality conquering fast his wounds, was to be borne ahead of us. And when all was done Lakla, Larry, and I made our way up to the scarlet stone that was the doorway to the chamber of the Three.

We knew, of course, that they had gone, following, no doubt, those whose eyes I had seen in the curdled mists, and who, coming to the aid of the Three at last from whatever mysterious place that was their home, had thrown their strength with them against the Shining One. Nor were we wrong. When the great slab rolled away, no torrents of opalescence came rushing out upon us. The vast dome was dim, tenantless. Its curved walls that had cascaded light shone now but faintly. The dais was empty; its wall of moon-flame radiance gone.

A little time we stood, heads bent, reverent, our hearts filled with gratitude and love—yes, and with pity for that strange trinity so alien to us and yet so near. Children even as we, though so unlike us, of our same Mother Earth.

And what, I wondered, had been the secret of that promise they had wrung from their handmaiden and from Larry?

Then Lakla softly closed the crimson stone and we passed down—down the corridors, out of the abode, to where, upon the span, a few score of the handmaiden's own black-and-orange-scaled warriors awaited us. They were those who had been pressed back into the castle by the onrush of the dead-alive and those who had remained to garrison the island after Lugur's surprise attack. The mystery of the red dwarf's appearance was explained when we discovered a half-dozen of the water *coria* moored in a small cove not far from where the *Sekta* flashed their heads of living bloom.

The dwarfs had borne the shallops with them, and from somewhere beyond the cavern ledge had launched them unperceived; stealing up to the farther side of the island and risking all in one bold stroke. Well, Lugur, no matter what he held of wickedness, held also high courage.

The cavern was paved with the dead-alive, the *Akka* carrying them out by the hundreds, casting them into the waters. Through the lane down which the Dweller had passed we went as quickly as we could, coming at last to the space where the *coria* waited. Rador and the frog-king we placed in our own, where sat, too, the little frog-prince and Lakla's woman monster. As we sped toward the Portal, my eyes were busy with the marvels of the fern-land.

Not long after we swung past where the shadow had hung and hovered over the shining depths of the Midnight Pool.

Here the bodies of the green dwarfs lay thick. Guards from the *ladala* manned the ebon fortresses and the bridge. Loud were their shouts of welcome to us, and clamorous the greetings of the throngs that lined the emerald road as we swept out upon it.

THERE came to me a huge desire to see the destruction they had told us of the Dweller's lair; to observe for myself whether it was not possible to make a way of entrance and to study its mysteries.

I spoke of this, and to my surprise both the handmaiden and the O'Keefe showed an almost embarrassed haste to acquiesce in my hesitant suggestion.

We went to the temple; and here at least the ghastly litter of the dead had been cleaned away. We passed through the blue-caverned space, crossed the narrow arch that spanned the rushing sea stream, and, ascending, stood again upon the ivoried pave at the foot of the towering amphitheater of jet.

Across the Silver Waters there was sign of neither Web or Rainbows nor colossal pillars nor the templed lips that I had seen curving out beneath the Veil when the Shining One had swirled out to greet its priestess and its voice and to dance with the condemned. There was but a broken

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and rent mass of the radiant cliffs against whose base the lake lapped.

I dropped a little behind Larry and Lakla to examine a bit of carving—and, after all, they did not want me. I watched them pacing slowly ahead, his arm around her, black curls close to bronze-gold ringlets. Then I followed. Half were they over the bridge when through the roar of the imprisoned stream I heard my name called.

"Goodwin! Dr. Goodwin!"

Amazed, I turned. From behind the pedestal of a carved group slunk—Von Hetzdorp! My premonition had been right. Some way he had escaped, slipped through to here. He held his hands high, came forward cautiously.

"I am finished," he whispered—*"kaput! I don't know what they'll* do to me." He nodded toward the handmaiden and Larry, now at the end of the bridge and passing on, oblivious of all save each other. He drew closer. His eyes were sunken, burning, mad; his face etched with deep lines, as though a graver's tool had cut down through it. I took a step backward.

A grin, like the grimace of a fiend, blasted the German's visage. He threw himself upon me, his hands clenching at my throat!

"Larry!" I yelled—and as I spun around under the shock of his onslaught, saw the two turn, stand paralyzed, then race toward me.

"But *you'll* carry nothing out of here!" shrieked Von Hetzdorp. "No, by God!"

My foot, darting out behind me, touched vacancy. The roaring of the racing sea stream deafened me. I felt its mists about me; threw myself forward.

I was falling—falling—with the German's hands strangling me. I struck water, sank; the hands that gripped my throat relaxed for a moment their clutch. I strove to writhe loose; I felt that I was being hurled with dreadful speed on—full realization came—on the breast of that racing torrent dropping from some far ocean cleft and rushing—where? A little time, a few breathless instants, I struggled with the devil who clutched me—inflexibly, indomitably.

Then a shrieking as of all the pent winds of the universe in my ears—blackness!

Consciousness returned slowly.

"Larry!" I groaned. "Lakla!"

A BRILLIANT light was glowing now through my closed lids. It hurt. I opened my eyes, closed them with swords

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and needles of dazzling pain shooting through them. Again I opened them cautiously. It was the sun!

I staggered to my feet. Behind me was a shattered wall of basalt monoliths, hewn and squared. Before me was the Pacific, smooth and blue and smiling.

And not far away, cast up on the strand even as I had been, was— Von Hetzdorp! Von Hetzdorp, following me to the last—but dead!

The place was one of the farther islets of the Nan-Matal.

At dawn of the next day I got together driftwood and bound it together in shape of a rough raft, with fallen creepers. Then, with a makeshift paddle, I set forth for Nan-Tanach. Slowly, painfully, I crept up to it. It was late afternoon before I grounded my shaky craft on the little beach between the ruined sea gates and, creeping up the giant steps, made my way to the inner enclosure.

And at its opening I stopped, and the tears ran streaming down my cheeks.

For the great wall in which had been set the pale slab whose threshold we had crossed to the land of the Shining One, lay shattered and broken.

There was no Moon Door!

Dazed and weeping, I drew closer, climbed upon their outlying fragments. I looked out upon sea. There had been a great subsidence, an earth shock perhaps, tilting downward all that side—the echo, little doubt, of that cataclysm which had blasted the Dweller's lair!

There was no road to Larry—nor to Lakla!

Shall I ever see them again? Shall the world ever see them to do them that homage which they deserve?

I do not know.

But this I am sure. In that far land of mystery which seems now so irrevocably set apart from us they live—and are happy—gathering the fruit of their love and their high courage.

As for me—my heart is heavy, and I have much to do preparing the data I gathered in that too short time—hardly a month—for the study of my colleagues; the results of which will no doubt from time to time be placed before the public.

With my heartfelt thanks to my associates who have assisted me in this narrative, and, to Mr. Merritt for his guidance and always ungrudging aid, I bid you all: Farewell!

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Fantastic Novels, New Publications, Inc., 210 East 43rd St., New York 17, N. Y.

"JASON" A BIG SUCCESS

Dear Editor:

Thank you for publishing "Jason, Son of Jason" in the May *Fantastic Novels*. What a long wait we had for this last story of the "Palos" trilogy! I remember reading the second yarn, "The Mouthpiece of Zitu", while I was stationed at Alamogordo Army Air Base, so it must have appeared late in 1942. Perhaps due to a necessarily hasty perusal, that second story didn't seem to measure up to "Palos of the Dog Star Pack"; however, I think "Jason, Son of Jason" was almost as good as the original yarn.

I was glad to see Dr. Murray, the patient listener to Jason Croft's wild tales, finally given the opportunity of projecting himself across interstellar space and seeing the world of Palos for himself. But author J. U. Giesy lacked a sense of justice when he failed to provide Murray with a Palosian body so that he could remain and live on that picturesque planet. The least a writer can do is reward his long-suffering characters!

It is now more than a quarter century since Jason Croft introduced Palos to the civilizing influences of internal combustion, flying machines, wireless transmission, and incendiary bombs. I wonder if by now Palos has "progressed" to jeeps, jet-planes, singing commercials—and atomic bombs?

I was not particularly thrilled to see "The Moon Pool" again, for I have the story and its sequel in my F.F.M. files. However, Finlay's illustrations for the yarn were superb, being more in his pre-war style than most of his recent artwork. Both of his full-page pix this issue were in the "excellent" category.

Lawrence's cover was splendid, too.

It was a pleasure to behold Frank R. Paul's illustrations for the "Jason" story. It is wonderful to see the old master's work again in a current fantasy magazine. If possible, I'd like to see more of his work.

As for suggestions for future Munsey classics to feature in *Fantastic Novels*, by all means let us have the sequels to "Polaris—of the Snows," as well as any other good Stilson yarns still

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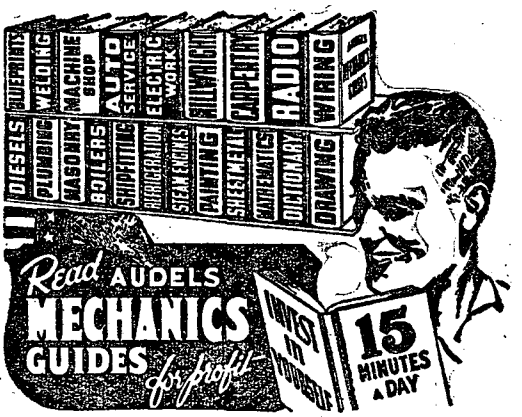

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available, such as "Land of the Shadow People" and "A Man Named Jones." There are still many George Allan England novels worthy of reprinting—such legendary tales as "The Fatal Gift" and "Beyond White Seas," and others. Francis Stevens, whose "Claimed" and "Serapion" are among the best F.F.M. yarns you ever printed, wrote other short stories and novels, including "Avalon" and "The Labyrinth"—both worth checking. And do not overlook all the great tales of Philip M. Fisher, Murray Leinster, J. U. Giesy, Perley Poore Sheehan, and Garret Smith.

Don't most of these Munsey fantasies have alluring, poetic titles? "The Spawn of Infinitude," "Black Butterflies," "City of the Unseen," "The Abyss of Wonder," "Beyond the Dark Nebula," "The Cave that Swims on the Water," "Adrift in the Unknown," "A Round Trip to the Year 2000," "The Lure of the Lavender Trees," "Across A Thousand Years," "Wings of the Snow," "Swords of Wax". . . .

REDD BOGGS.
Editor, *Chronoscope.*
2215 Benjamin St. N.E.,
Minneapolis 18, Minn.

GIESY'S TALE A HUMDINGER

I have just finished your May issue of *Fantastic Novels* and enjoyed it immensely.

The "Moon Pool" of course is a classic and Giesy's tale is a humdinger.

Now, how about giving us some Edgar Rice Burroughs, Serviss, Weinbaum, Cox and C. L. Moore yarns? And how about the "Polaris" trilogy?

Keep up the good work, other fantasy and science-fiction magazines compared with yours are like comparing comic books with Voltaire or Shakespeare.

RICHARD READER.
1000 West Sixth St.,
St. Paul, Minn.

WANTS "GIESY" BACK ISSUES

I have just finished reading "Jason, Son of Jason", by J. U. Giesy, and I am on record for saying that it is one of the best novels I have ever read. I am a constant reader of all S.F. magazines, but this is the first time I have thought enough of a story to actually sit down and write an editor a letter.

I missed the first two stories of this trilogy, and I wonder if anyone has any extra copies, or could tell me where I could get them.

Congratulations on a fine magazine.

GEORGE O. ROWLES.
597 20th St.,
S. Arlington, Va.

FINLAY FAN NO. 1 REPORTING

The May issue of F.N. was terrific. Thanks a million for "Moon Pool" and "Jason, Son of Jason". I'll bet you get thousands of comments on the new F.N.—all good.

Thanks also for giving the Tiffin bunch a plug

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

in that issue. We are a small group, but one of the most rabid of Fantasy groups.

I have raved plenty about Virgil in the past, but the one on p.21 of "The Moon Pool"—"In her blood ran the beliefs and superstitions of the Northland, etc."—is beyond even my wildest dreams.

Lord, I even think about it in my sleep. Horrible, beautiful, fascinating. I can't name it.

I guess I just go nuts over Finlay. Bless you for your marvelous magazines, dear editor.

As in the toast in "Ark of Fire" by Hawkins—"May you live forever, and may I never die."

JACK ROBERTS.

69 Erie St.,
Tiffin, Ohio.

WELCOME BACK, TO PAUL

Just a few words about the new F.N. 'S wonderful! The Finlays for the "Moon Pool" were the best work he has done since his "Conquest of the Moon Pool" drawings. I hope he does not slip again. Why not have him color his drawing for the last part of "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" (April 1940) as the cover for this story when you run it? The big surprise of the issue, of course, was the return of Paul! (And pleasant memories returned with him. Very pleasant). Please give us the rest of "Polaris" soon!

BEN INDICK.

443 Jersey Ave.,
Elizabeth 2, N. J.

COMPLIMENTING LAWRENCE

What do U think? That is a rather personal question, but by the looks of the column your readers *are* writing their thoughts. Far be it from me to change the general trend.

1. There was really no reason for reprinting "The Moon Pool." The Merrittale has been reprinted countless times in countless other forms. But, the title is so famous, the story is so famous, and the author is so famous, that, commercially, it was a very good thing to include the story in FN. U probably sold more issues of the mag merely by inserting that story, than U would have if U left it out.

2. "Jason, Son of Jason" was very, very welcome. It kinda lost a little of its richness if U hadn't read the previous Palos stories, though. Lucky me had the two copies of F.F.M. in which they appeared, so I reread the others before reading the third. "Jason, Son of Jason" was like meeting an old friend. Pardon me, while I breathe a sigh of satisfaction!

3. The cover was quite nice. My compliments, Mr. Lawrence.

4. Finlay is Finlay. Could anything be better?

5. Paul was a very pleasant sight, but I still don't think he can draw people too well. When it comes to machines the chap can't be beat. Will there be more of him? How 'bout that, Miss G.? Are U planning to use the original illustrations on some of the novels, or are all the purty pictures going to be done by Finlay, Lawrence, & Co.?

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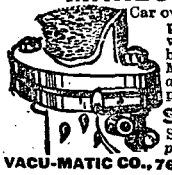

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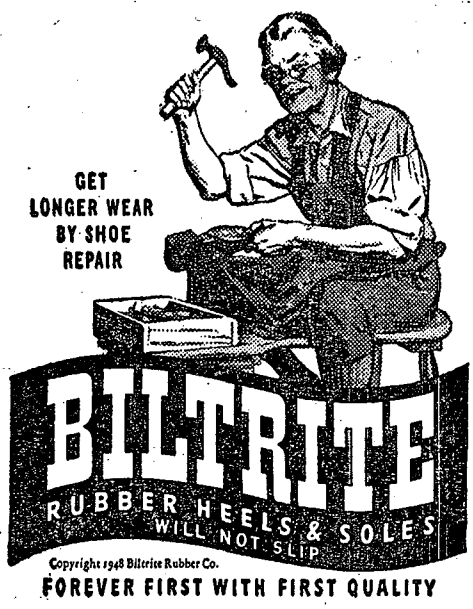

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FANTASTIC NOVELS

The readers' department is rapidly shaping up to the one in F.F.M. All of which means we are in for some very fine reading. Enlarge it, and let more give their views.

Suggestions? Nope, I don't have any suggestions for future issues of FN. I'll just sit back on the corner of the newsstand and let the experts determine what U are going to reprint next. However, if I make one tiny plea, one minute request, don't count it against me. Pleez, pleez, make the reprints *both* fantasy and stf. Don't limit yourselves. Serve two masters by pleasing both the stf and fantasy addicts. U'll be pleasing me, too!

Thankfully,

DECIL.

170 "C" St., Apt. #2,
Upland, Calif.

Editor's Note: Drawings by Frank R. Paul will appear in future issues of F.N.

WANTS GARRET SMITH STORIES

Fantastic Novels is back, and with Munsey reprints! Ah! How I and others fought for this! And many thanks for "Jason, Son of Jason."

I think Cordell Mahaney is unduly exercised over the stories he abhors.

Stop those ghoulish covers! ! !

V. Coriell: Victor Mature and Carole Landis appeared on the "Darkness and Dawn" cover.

More like "Atlantis' Exile" for F.F.M. and next for F.N.—"Treasures of Tantalus", "After A Million Years", and "On the Brink of 2,000"—all by Garret Smith.

J. WASSO, JR.

119 Jackson Ave.,
Pen Argyl, Pa.

REQUESTS G. A. ENGLAND YARNS

With much surprise and satisfaction I picked up a copy of the new *Fantastic Novels* containing "Ship of Ishtar". Since that, the 2nd issue came out with "Jason, Son of Jason." I was beginning to wonder if I would ever read the 3rd story of the "Palos" trilogy. With the "Second Deluge" scheduled for the 3rd issue, I think you are doing all right for a start.

I hope you keep this magazine strictly to Munsey reprints, of which you have a treasure house full for many years to come.

For future issues, and in the near future, I would like to see the 2nd and 3rd story of the "Polaris" trilogy, for which I note most everyone has asked in your May issue. Also keep in mind England's "Flying Legion" and any others by him.

I trust that you will not overdo reprinting of stories which have already been in F.F.M. and F.N., since there are too many stories yet to be published.

As for F.N.'s sister magazine, F.F.M., how about H. Rider Haggard a little more often?

For a long continued success for *Fantastic Novels*.

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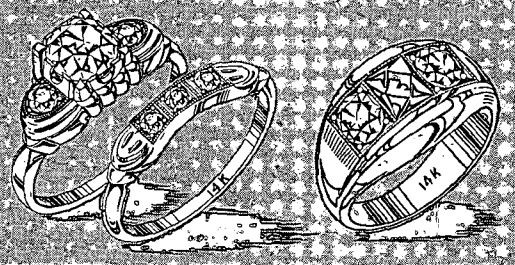

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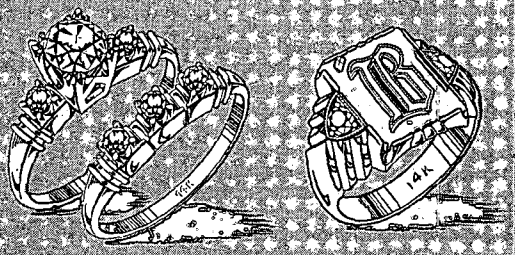

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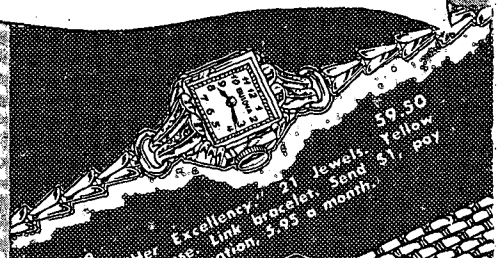

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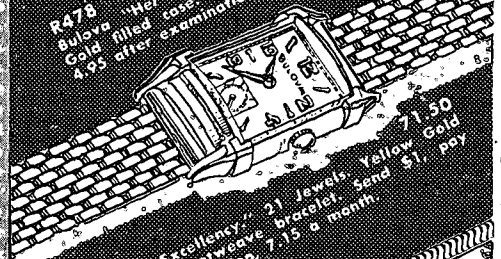

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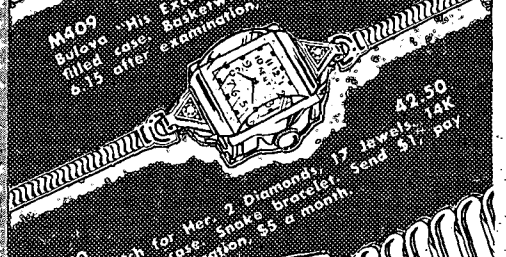

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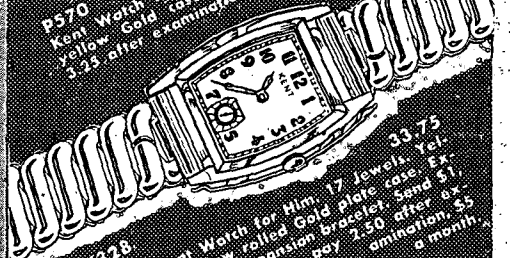

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